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DARING DAVY, The Young Bear Killer; or, the Trail of the Border Wolf.

BY HARRY ST. GEORGE,

AUTHOR OF "ROARING RALPH ROCKWOOD," "RATTLING RUBE," "OLD HICKORY," ETC., ETC.



"Stand back! or so surely as there is a sky above us, I will send your soul unbidden, before the judgment bar. Stand back!"

Daring Davy, THE YOUNG BEAR KILLER; OR, THE TRAIL OF THE BORDER WOLF.

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CHAPTER I.

THE DEATH LEAGUE.

"THEN Davy Crockett must die!"

The man who gave utterance to this emphatic sentence stood in the center of a dilapidated old cabin that was almost entirely hidden in the heart of a dense forest. Giant trees grew all around it, their branches drooping so as to almost conceal the log hut from view.

Outside, the night breeze swept down the forest aisles, rustling the leaves in the passage and carrying many of them with it to the ground. The fair moon had wheeled up in the eastern heavens, and Jupiter was leading the march of the planets across the firmament. Now and then the melancholy howl of a wolf could be heard, sounding dismally through the silence of the night, and once a panther lent its shrill scream to awaken the echoes of the glen beyond, for the woods of old Tennessee were full of savage game at this early day.

The scene inside the cabin was certainly wild enough to have pleased the most exacting.

Four men stood around a rickety table with drawn knives. The man who had just uttered that sentence of death was a perfect giant in point of size. He was known in the backwoods as Hercules Dan, and had been a hunter and trapper, living on what he could shoot and steal.

Two of the others possessed ill-favored faces, while the last did not condescend to show his features, which were completely hidden under a heavy hat, and a rough scarf which he had wound around his neck and the lower half of his face.

So intent had the conspirators been upon the relation of their grievances against Davy Crockett that they had ears for nothing else, and a quivering of the roof above them passed by unheeded.

Hercules Dan told with many an oath how the young bear-hunter and several comrades had ridden him on a rail and threatened to shoot him on sight if he was ever found east of the Seven Hickories.

Mose Martin next had the floor. He rolled up his sleeve and showed some black marks on his arm, the strangest looking spots imaginable.

"Kin any o' ye tell what that air?" he demanded, indignantly.

All of them professed the most profound ignorance on the subject.

"Ye'll know some day if ye ever git in the hands o' them critters. That's pitch tar, gentlemen! Yes sree, I war tarred and feathered, I war!"

Then he went on to tell the particulars. Davy Crockett figured in the affair conspicuously, and Mose had sworn a solemn oath that if ever he caught the "critter" alone, and his back was turned, he'd put a chunk of lead through his heart in double-quick time, and be just as bold about it as any man could be.

Then up spoke Dave Rawlings, who had once been a circuit rider. He was a much mutilated and deeply injured man—in his own estimation of course. As usual, Crockett was the one to blame. He was walking past the cabin home of the young hunter, when a couple of hens came and alighted upon his gun, which he had laid down for a minute. His word as a parson could be taken for that. As he could not scare them off in any way, and was compelled to take his gun, they persisted in going also. He met Davy and a friend, who immediately threatened to shoot him, calling him a thief and all manner of names. How could he help it if the two obstinate chickens took it into their heads to die, and hang from his rifle-barrel as if in defiance to Davy!

The end of it was, he was compelled upon penalty of his life to open his right hand and hold it against a tree. Davy aimed his rifle and fired, cutting one of his fingers off, and maiming him for life.

"That is a reward of merit," Davy had said, as he and his friend, picking up the defunct chickens, walked laughingly away, leaving him slumping with pain.

This was quite a time ago, and Dave had been

discreet enough to maintain a reserve when in Davy's presence, but it was pretty well known how bitterly he hated the young fellow, and that when the time for revenge came, it would be a sweet morsel to him.

Every time he looked at his mutilated hand, he renewed the oath he had made on that occasion, and which would be all the better for keeping so long.

There now remained only the man whose face was so well concealed by his hat and scarf. From the shadow of the former, there gleamed a pair of ferocious eyes, that seemed to flash and scintillate with some suppressed fury.

"What cause I have for hating Davy Crockett does not matter, my friends. Let it suffice that I do hate him, terribly—that it will be the happiest moment of my life when I can lay him dying at the feet of the girl he is to marry, or, failing in that, wring his heart by carrying her off. Who I am none of you know; but you may call me Squire Lawrence. You all had cause to hate this man bitterly, but the feeling you entertain for him is as nothing when compared to mine. I would sting him like an adder, crush him under my feet, bruise his heart first if possible, and then, while he is dying, whisper my name in his ear. I could gloat over his suffering. Each groan wrung from his heart on account of her, would be music to my ears. Should his tears flow, they would never wash out the hatred I bear him, for it is carved on a heart of stone. Now you understand a little, my feeling toward him. It is to the advantage of us all that he dies, but as I am to gain more than any of you, I promise solemnly that when the end comes, I shall give Hercules Dan here a purse of gold to divide among you. That is all."

The man then took out a knife, a toy dagger, but a dangerous weapon for an angry person to handle withal.

"Draw your blades, comrades."

In an instant three more shining knives glinted in the torchlight, and were raised aloft.

"We are all determined!"

It was the Squire who asked this, and the others assented without hesitation.

"Then Davy Crockett must die."

"Whose blade will be the lucky one to drink the critter's blood?" asked the giant.

They looked at each other; no one could say. The future alone would determine this question.

"We must act in concert, for I have heard stories told of his prowess. If by any manner of means we could inveigle him to an out-of-the-way place like this, he would never be seen again."

It was the Squire who spoke. With his small, shapely hand he replaced his dagger in its sheath. His voice was round and peculiar as though, to disguise it, he had placed a hickory nut in his cheek.

"That's easily done," put in Mose, with a leer. "Couldn't we bring his gal into the scrape, and have her see the fun?"

"That would be glorious!" cried the Squire, who seemed delighted with the project.

These men were no fools.

They noticed how he seemed concerned in Davy's sweetheart, and every one of them immediately concluded that he was a rival, whom the young backwoodsman had outrun in the race for the girl's affections.

How far from the truth they were, the reader will discover before this tale is done.

At any rate it mattered little or nothing to them what his motive was so long as their object was served.

"Once let us lay our hands on him, and his life will not be worth a shilling," said the giant, with a scowl.

"Would that the fiends of Tophet could send him here at this moment when we are assembled with the oath still fresh on our lips!" and the Squire clinched his hand as though he already felt its grasp upon the neck of the man he hated with a bitterness that could only be quenched in the life-blood of Davy Crockett.

As if the fiends of the lower regions had answered his wish, there was at this instant a sudden cracking noise heard, and the roof of the cabin gave way under the weight of the man, who, lying upon it with his eye glued to an opening, had heard and witnessed all that had taken place below.

The cabin, as has been said, was old and dilapidated. Finding no crevice through which to view the proceedings within, the man had stealthily clambered to the roof, where he had lain in safety, until an unlucky move had precipitated himself and some of the timbers into the cabin.

He fell between the four men, knocked Mose

over, and the table ditto, and, bounding to his feet himself, leaped back like a panther.

Rifle in hand, he stood with his back to the door. For perhaps ten seconds silence like unto death fell upon them. The giant was the first of the conspirators to regain something like his usual presence of mind, and it was his voice that bellowed out the words:

"*Thar stands Davy Crockett!*"

CHAPTER II.

BLACK EYES AND BLUE.

THE sun was setting behind the high hills in the west, and as he seemed to pause before making his exit, along the eastern horizon the low-lying clouds shone with the reflected glory of his light, their edges tipped with silver and gold.

Streamers of sunshine, all radiating from the common center, spread themselves over the forest, piercing the distance and looking not unlike so many broad pathways down which one might travel to—it might be fame, or fortune, or death.

At last the king of day vanished from view, and twilight, that delicious half-hour during the fall that hovers between broad, glaring day, and black, yawning night, settled upon the face of the earth.

Nestled in the heart of the forest and yet not a part of the forest, because there was a clearing around it, lay a cabin. It was well built, and showed no little skill in the backwoods architect, whoever he might be.

Back of the cabin stood a second one, which served as a stable, and into which would be gathered, later, the crop of grain that had been harvested in the field beyond the forest.

At this twilight hour, in front of this homestead, a young girl was seated, engaged in some little household sewing, and singing softly to herself.

In all the country there could not have been found a face more fair than that of Rosebud Thornton. Her hair was like coils of golden strands, and her blue eyes the color of violets wet with the cool morning dew.

This was the girl whom Davy was to marry. Her father had been well off, but a reverse of fortune had come to him, and he had been compelled to seek a home in the wilderness.

Thither he had gone, taking his family with him, and also a couple of negro servants who clung to the altered fortunes of the master they loved so well.

His wife had since died, and lay under the wild flowers that bloomed in the wood, and one of his boys had gone to a distant city with the intention of making a business man out of himself, but old Major Thornton found his last days very pleasant ones, away from the trouble and turmoil of the world.

He still had with him his boy, Roger, and the darling of his old age, Rosebud, whom gallant Davy Crockett was so soon to carry off.

Engrossed in her occupation, the young girl did not notice the approach of any one, until a heavy trampling noise reached her ear. Looking up, she saw a horse close beside her, on which was mounted a girl not much older than herself.

Such a contrast as the two presented, both beautiful, but the one with the glory of sunbeams in her hair, and the other with the somber shades of night amid her sable tresses. Great black eyes looked down upon Rosebud Thornton, with something more than curiosity in their glance.

Who it was she could not positively say, never having seen her before, but she had heard of Judge Abner Warner's daughter, the heiress to the fine house beyond the hills, and thought this must be she.

"I beg your pardon, but would it be too much trouble for you to get me a cup of water? I have been riding far and feel very thirsty," said the young lady.

Rosebud had a sweet, obliging disposition, and she hastened to comply with the very civil request. As she went into the house to get a cup, and from there to the well back of it, she smiled to find herself living over again the day when Davy and herself had taken the long ramble over the hills in search of wild flowers, until they neared the Warner estate. That was the first, and last, and only time she had ever seen the stately house of Abner Warner, with its spacious grounds.

On this day Davy had confessed his love for her, in the manly way that seemed a part of his nature, and how could she help responding to his pleadings?

Seated on the hill, at a point where they had a good view of the house, the young hunter told her all about Barbara Warner. They had been playmates for many years, and she always admired him, but Davy had been afraid of her

temper, more especially during the last year, for Barbara had developed a strange mood which had puzzled him exceedingly, at one time looking into his eyes as if she saw something there that chained her, and the next accusing him of not liking her; so the result had been he avoided the Warner house altogether.

All these things went through the mind of Rosebud as she walked to and from the well. For this rider was the girl who had loved her Davy—for she had divined with a woman's intuition what blind Crockett had never suspected, that Barbara was in love with him and feared that he did not return the passion that had been gradually growing for years with her.

Why had she come here?

Rosebud could guess, but she did not choose to. She held up the cup of water, and looked into the great black eyes that seemed fathomless.

"Thank you," said the other, sweetly.

She slowly swallowed a little of the cup's contents, and then lowered it from her lips.

"You are Rosebud Thornton, I believe?"

The question was asked suddenly and without any hesitation.

"I am; and you are Barbara Warner I am sure," replied the fair young girl.

"You have guessed it. Strange that we have never met before, and neighbors at that. We shall perhaps see more of each other now that our paths have crossed; at least I hope so."

"It is probable, Miss Warner."

"Do you not like me?" said Barbara, suddenly, detecting the evident reserve of the other.

"I hardly know you," declared Rosebud, in some little confusion, fearing that she had shown her feelings too plainly.

"That does not matter a particle. People generally like or dislike at sight, at least I do. I do not blame you, Miss Thornton, for I can guess the reason," and the proud girl, leaning forward looked into the blue eyes.

"Then you know more than I do, for I have not the slightest cause to dislike you in the world. I never saw you before, and what I have heard—"

"Ay, what have you heard? What has Davy Crockett whispered in your ear about Barbara Warner?" she asked, fiercely.

"Nothing to your discredit, I am sure. He told me that you had grown up together, and were like brother and sister until—"

"Until you came between with your golden hair and false blue eyes. Nay, do not start back and look indignant. I came here with a purpose, girl. I wished to see the one who had bewitched Davy Crockett, who had stolen his heart from me. You smile, perhaps in pity, perhaps in derision, but I tell you it is so. There was a time when Davy loved me, and I was happy. True, he never told me so, but I could read it in his eyes and every action. Those were heavenly days when we wandered over the hills together, Davy and I. Why do I tell you this? It is because I love him still. Is there any shame in my repeating it? I love the man who is to be your husband, madly as woman ever loved. To win him I would do anything in this world. He was mine before you came; you stole his heart from me, and may Heaven's—"

"Stop! I will not listen to you. How dare you come here and insult me at my father's door? If there was robbery done, I had no hand in it. Davy Crockett never loved you; he told me he might have done so but for your temper; so you see there is no one to blame but yourself in the matter."

The blue eyes flashed as Rosebud spoke, and for a short time Barbara winced before the cutting words. Then anger came to her aid, first in the shape of sarcasm:

"Listen to my lady! One would think she was speaking to her maid. See the light in the false blue eyes! That is what she used to capture poor Davy's heart, I warrant," then bending low in the saddle, so that she could look straight into Rosebud's eyes, she continued in shriller tones, in which anger could be plainly traced: "Have a care, Rosebud Thornton, how you come between Davy Crockett and Barbara Warner. If I believed what you told me to be the truth, he should never live to see his bridal day. Ah, well do they say: 'Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.' There is no torment that I could think of, too bad for Davy Crockett, if this be true. But I do not hate you, Rosebud Thornton; I do not wish you evil; but on this I am determined: as sure as there is a blue sky above us, I swear that you shall not be Crockett's bride, and I will keep my oath if I have to shoot him down at your side. If he will have it

so, then Davy Crockett shall be wedded to death. Hark ye, girl, you have heard the vow of a woman whose wrongs have well-nigh made her mad."

The strange girl wheeled her horse with a fierce rein, and rode off. At the edge of the clearing, she halted, and turning once more, surveyed the cabin and its surroundings.

"Remember," she cried aloud, and then vanished from view in the gathering shades of night.

"Poor girl," said Rosebud to herself, "I am afraid she is not quite in her senses. What terrible things she said. Could Davy— No; I can take his word against the world. She deceived herself, and will not have her eyes opened. What is there in a woman's vow? I can laugh at it, but, somehow, the memory of those black eyes chills my blood. Pray Heaven that no harm may come to my Davy, my king. What have I done that this trial should come upon me? And yet she is more to be pitied than I. Well, I must try to forget this mad scene, but Davy must know, when he comes to-morrow. He will laugh at me, I fear."

A woman's vow! Before many hours had gone by, brave Crockett was destined to find out what a woman would descend to, to seek revenge.

CHAPTER III.

A HUMAN TIGRESS.

"*Thar stands Davy Crockett!*"

When the giant uttered these words, he gave no news to any of his friends, for they knew full well who the man was upon whose form their eyes fell.

Mose had been sent sprawling over, in company with the old table, but he managed to gain a half-erect position, and, with his weight resting upon his arm, surveyed the strange spectacle.

The man whose abrupt and unannounced entry had caused such a commotion among them, stood with his left foot thrown forward, his keen eyes fastened upon the disconcerted group of conspirators.

Rough though his tumble had been, Davy held on to his rifle, through it all, and the frowning muzzle of this faithful weapon now menaced his foes.

The giant proved to be the first to break the silence that rested upon them.

"Davy Crockett, you've come to your doom. Thar's no use explainin' matters as ye have heard 'em all. What fate brought ye to this spot, and throwed ye into our power? Anyhow it are lucky for us."

"That remains to be proved," answered the young bear-hunter, who showed not the slightest evidence of any excitement, "that remains to be proved. You are four to one, but thar's going to be a tough little scrimmage in this cabin before Davy Crockett pegs out."

"That may be, Davy; we know ye ain't reckoned a coward, but it won't alter the case a whit. Ye are bound to go under, and that mighty quick."

Hercules Dan made this emphatic remark with a great deal of confidence.

"Wait a minute before you open the ball," remarked Davy, with perfect coolness; "I can understand why you three men should hate me, for I have given you good cause, I reckon, but to my knowledge I have never seen this Squire, as he chooses to call himself, before, and before I die, as you seem so sure I am going to turn up my toes, will the honorable gentleman give some sort o' an inkling as to how I've offended him?"

The Squire seemed to be shaking with suppressed wrath, and Davy could see his eyes gleaming from under the shelter of his hat.

"Rosebud Thornton!"

The name came from between clinched teeth, and Davy gave a low laugh.

It was growing plainer, now, to his comprehension, although he could not yet grasp the whole matter; but, there could be only one explanation! This was an unsuccessful lover of the belle of the backwoods, although, for the life of him he could not hazard a guess as to his identity.

He was given little time for reflection upon the matter. These human tigers wanted his blood, and from the manner in which their glaring eyes shone upon him, he knew there was no shirking the encounter.

It might be that his last hour had come. Looking upon the fierce faces and gleaming blades, one could imagine such a thing without stretch of the imagination.

Well, be it so; they should find that a Crockett never feared death. He had faced the grim

monster often, in the hunt, and never as yet had he been known to flinch.

Fate destined Mose Martin, the man who had been tarred and feathered, to be the one who should bring down the vials of Davy's wrath upon his head.

He was the nearest to the torch that had been thrust into a crack in the wall. Turning, he gave this a blow with his hand, that sent it to the floor, and then commenced stamping upon it with great earnestness.

It was the intention of the scoundrels under cover of the gloom to dispatch him.

Crockett saw through it all and was quick to act, for there suddenly followed the sharp, quick crack of the bear-hunter's long rifle. A yell burst from the lips of the tarred and feathered man, telling that Mose Martin was mortally stricken.

The torch was still burning a little, and by its dim light Davy saw his victim stagger back against the wall of the cabin, pressing his hand against his breast, where the fatal lead had struck him.

With a shout and a curse, the others sprung forward. The Squire for some reason held back. He seemed to have a different idea from Mose, for, stooping down, he picked up the torch, and calmly waved it about his head until it broke out into a flame.

Then, drawing a pistol he stood like a statue, waiting until the chance came for him to end the matter by emptying its contents into the body of Crockett.

During this time a terrible struggle had been taking place.

When Davy saw the two man-wolves leap at him as though they would tear at his throat like so many fierce brutes, he swung his rifle around, and brought the barrel against the giant's head with terrible force, and Hercules Dan dropped as if shot.

Before the hunter could well recover himself, the other wretch was upon him. The knife was driven straight at his breast, but only to strike the steel of his gun. His life was saved for the moment, and instantly the bear-hunter threw himself upon the chicken-thief, and the two went down in a confused mass.

They squirmed about like so many snakes, and it was a difficult matter to tell which was Davy and which was his foe.

Once the Squire sprung forward, and, clapping his pistol to the head of one of them, was just on the point of firing, when the face was turned toward the light, and the Squire recognized Dave Rawlings, the ex-circuit-rider.

Before the mysterious man could take advantage of this, the squirming commenced again, with greater violence than before, and he could not decide which one to massacre.

He once more stood erect, but seemed to be terribly excited, judging from the way in which the torch trembled in his white hand.

Davy found a tough customer in Dave Rawlings, for the man was muscular, and extraordinarily agile. Besides, he realized that his situation was desperate, and hence put out every atom of strength he possessed.

It was only a couple of minutes that these two thrashed about in such a lively manner upon the floor, but it certainly seemed much longer to all the parties concerned.

At length one of the contestants got the upper hand of his enemy, and taking his head in his hands, he bumped it fiercely a dozen times upon the hard deal flooring until insensibility followed.

Flushed with triumph, Crockett looked up, to find the pistol of the Squire staring him in the face, and back of it a pair of gleaming eyes, speaking of the deadly hatred that was in the soul of this, his most mysterious foe.

Crockett realized his position like a flash, and one of his hands, flying upward, sent the pistol a dozen feet away, to the other side of the cabin. Nor was he slow to follow up the advantage he had gained, for, leaping to his feet, he threw himself upon the Squire, and caught him in a fierce grip.

Hardly had his arms closed around the man than they were unlocked, and Crockett sprang back as though stung by an adder.

"Heavens!" he exclaimed, "it is a woman!"

The Squire seemed to cringe for half a minute, and then recovering, assumed a bold attitude. There was a flash of steel as she drew the little dagger, and then the heel of her boot came down upon the flickering torch, almost extinguishing it.

"Go your way, Davy Crockett, and seek not to find out why I hate you. It seems that my time for revenge has not yet come, but come it will just as sure as I live. You have escaped."

this time; you are a brave man, but the next time, beware! Perhaps you will receive a wound from my hand, through one you love, sooner than you suspect. Do not come near me, or I will drive this steel to your heart. Go!"

Crockett picked up his rifle, and, lifting the bar, opened the door a trifle, and slipped out, leaving the mysterious woman alone with her minions.

Even as he hurried away he heard a deep thud as her dagger struck the door, and realized that the disguised tigress had in the last moment again tried to assassinate him.

"What does it mean?" he said, to himself, again and again, as he hastened through the dense forest; "who is she, and what has Davy Crockett done to merit her hatred? That never was a woman that I didn't like; and, somehow, she made me think of Barbara Warner. Ugh! what a foe; I shudder to think of her. What did she mean by striking a blow through one I loved? Pray Heaven it is not my Rosebud. My heart sinks at the thought. Forward, Davy, forward!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE LOST BRIDE.

A BACKWOODS wedding was a great affair at the time of which I write, and Davy Crockett was so well known and universally liked that there was quite a turn-out on the occasion.

The days had sped by, on fairy wings.

Winter was not far away, and the wedding must needs come off soon, or else it would have to be deferred until the next spring, for Thornton declared his daughter should not be married when there was snow.

Old Mother Grannis, a personage who had figured at all the weddings and burials in the backwoods for almost a score of years, was given charge of the affair. Such cakes and pies, browned turkeys and chickens, as were to be seen in the large cabin would have made the mouth of an epicure water.

The cabin of Rosebud's father was much larger than most of those of the settlers, for, as has been said before, he had seen better days, and could not have lived in a one-room house.

Back of it a platform had been built and walled in. It was intended for dancing, and could be put to very good use afterward as a place of storage for fruit and grain.

The guests came early and often, that is, each neighbor brought his whole family with him, intending to make a gala occasion of it. Rosebud was of course invisible, as she was being dressed for the ceremony by several of her friends.

Davy was on hand, the subject of congratulations from all quarters, and looking as happy as a new moon. Still, he did not feel like himself in the new suit of clothes, and wished fifty times he was back at home with the thing all over and himself rigged out in his buckskin again.

The parson was a queer sort of a fish. His face was half concealed from view by the high choker which he wore, and his wig came down to his ears, so that the poor man seemed utterly extinguished. Parson Goodman, their "regular" minister, was off on a business trip to the East, and as a last resort a messenger had been mounted and sent over the mountains to get Parson Truelove, whose field of labor lay there, and this was the queer chap who answered the summons.

His black coat was buttoned up to within six inches of his chin where the white frilled shirt made its appearance. He made himself quite at home with the good people, but kept rather shy of the bridegroom, who had fired off some pretty broad jokes at his expense, earlier in the evening.

The guests were now all assembled and the house was pretty well filled, all but the little room where Rosebud sat, dressed for the ceremony in simple white.

Parson Truelove had confided to Mother Grannis the fact that it was his invariable custom to have a few minutes' private conversation with the bride just before the ceremony, and that good body declared she would manage it, so when all was ready, she came to him.

"You will find the dear girl in the room yonder. Don't say anything that will take the peaches from her cheeks, for she is just too beautiful. There, parson, go in, and mind you are not to stay over five minutes, for the folks will be anxious," and she shook her finger at him as a coquetish young girl might, and then closed the door after him.

Rosebud sat with her head in her hands think-

ing. These were her last few minutes alone. She lived over much of the happy past while sitting there, and the rosy-hued future seemed also to rise up before her. She failed to see the danger that rose so close to her like a phantom hand, shadowing and threatening to blot out the future.

How cunningly everything was contrived, and with what devilish skill carried out. It came very near being a perfect success.

"Look up, my daughter; I wish to have a few last words with you before performing the ceremony that forever links your fortunes with those of Davy Crockett."

The parson had slyly unfastened the bolt of the door leading to the outer regions, before standing before her and thus arresting her attention.

Even as he was speaking, it was pushed back quickly and noiselessly, and the figure of a man entered. His steps were cat-like; indeed, considering his size it was wonderful how he could move with such a silent tread.

The candlelight fell upon his face, and revealed the ill-favored features of Hercules Dan, the border wolf. A patch upon his face was the mark given him during the cabin fight with Davy Crockett, nor did it add any thing to the beauty of his ugly countenance.

Poor Rosebud! With all her friends so near, and she in the power of these fiends!

A white face looked in at the door, and watched the proceeding with intense interest.

The young girl had just looked up to reply to the parson's words, and a smile wreathed her face as she saw his singular attire, when a rude hand suddenly forced a handkerchief upon her face, and held it there in spite of her struggles.

Before half a minute had passed the young girl lay back unconscious, and not a sound had been made to alarm the guests.

A girlish figure glided in through the open door. It was Barbara Warner, she who had said that, if Davy Crockett would not have her, he would wed with death. The long cloak was thrown from her shoulders and revealed that she, too, was dressed in white like the bride.

Her plans had changed a dozen times since the meeting with Davy in the cabin, where he had dropped into the power of her hired knaves, and overcome them, and this was the result. She was determined to risk all in a grand coup, come what might.

The five minutes was at length over, and the throng outside had become very impatient. Davy was as nervous as a cat—at least he said so a dozen times during that interval.

At length there came a sound from within that indicated they were stirring. It might have been a door shut, or a stool moved, but at all events it spoke of life, and the crowd of backwoods guests became very impatient and expectant. Then the door opened, and the funny parson made his appearance.

No one thought to laugh at his odd dress now, for the impending ceremony was too solemn a thing.

He walked gracefully into the crowded room, and on his arm was the bride.

Perhaps the young girls who had assisted to dress Rosebud, noticed with a little annoyance, that she had disarranged their pretty tresses. And the veil, no one had known of that before. It must have been a little surprise of Rosebud's, and they could but mentally compliment her upon her taste.

Gathered in a bunch after covering her face, it hid her hair entirely from view.

Davy's heart thrilled with pride, as he found himself pushed forward by his hunter friends, and offered his arm to this beautiful vision.

As for the bride to be, her hand trembled as she placed it upon his arm, and together they walked over to where the minister had taken his position.

A great hush had fallen upon the guests. Rough hunters though many of them were, they seemed spellbound at the beautiful sight, and the only sound that could be heard was an occasional long-drawn sigh from some fellow whose eyes seemed popping out of his head, or it might be the giggling of a young girl in whose ear an amorous swain was whispering prophesies concerning the future when she might occupy a like position and be the "observed of all observers."

Davy conducted himself well; at least the spectators seemed to think so. One of his friends, a tall, lank hunter named Rube Long, and whose synonym was generally turned around the other way, had his face shining with happiness, and unable to repress the admiration that swelled his heart, he suddenly burst out with:

"Well done, Davy! You walk up like a man goin' to his mother-in-law's funeral."

Then suddenly realizing that he had put his foot in it, the long hunter, unable to stand the fire of so many eyes turned upon him, drew his head in like a tortoise, and withdrew from the public gaze.

Davy's heart was beating like a trip-hammer, and he had great work to keep up the bold appearance. The words of his true friend, although inappropriate, seemed to brace him up. A smile came upon his lips.

"The eyes of the people are on me," he thought, "and I must be a credit to the Crockett family, but I'll be hanged if they ever catch me here again."

There was something else troubling Davy; what it was he could not tell, but a strange admonition of disaster and trouble such as he had never felt before, and which a man should feel least of all upon his wedding night.

The ceremony commenced. In his squeaky voice the parson went on, and at length came to the place where the contracting parties must clasp hands.

No sooner had Davy laid eyes on the ungloved hand extended to him than an electric shock went through his frame. He was quick to recover however, and instead of taking the hand in his, he quickly but dextrously threw back the bridal veil.

"Great Heaven!"

There stood disclosed, instead of pretty Rosebud Thornton's features, the proud and beautiful face of Barbara Warner! In her lustrous black eyes was an expression of fear, foiled hatred, and love, if such a strange mixture could be found.

"Where is Rosebud?"

The hoof-strokes of a horse were now heard, and guests and bridegroom hastened to the doors and windows. Like an arrow of light there sped past them a horse on which was mounted the giant border wolf, Hercules Dan. In front of him he carried the senseless form of the lost bride!

Away they went like a meteor and were lost in the darkness beyond, but the hoof-strokes could still be heard, although growing fainter.

Davy Crockett hurled the woman who clung to him aside, leaped out of the window, and threw himself upon one of the horses, tearing after the border wolf like a whirlwind over the prairie.

CHAPTER V.

BACKWOODS JUSTICE.

SUCH a scene as ensued in the cabin, after Davy Crockett had gone!

Those of the guests who could, pushed out through the doors, while others crowded the windows.

The light shone over the fence to which many horses in rude vehicles, and saddle animals besides, were hitched. It was upon one of these latter that the horse-thief had ridden away with his senseless burden.

Davy had not waited to get either his hat or rifle, but, hastily leaping upon the back of the nearest steed, after tearing the bridle loose he had set out upon the track of the fugitive, who, bearing the girl who was to have been his bride by this time but for the plotting of the black-eyed Barbara, had dashed down the road through the timber, and was out of sight although not beyond hearing.

When Davy had vanished, the attention of the guests was turned to another quarter. The queer parson had vanished from the place as had also Rube Long.

In the middle of the room stood Barbara. The sudden ruin of her artful plan just in the moment of its consummation had given her a blow that seemed to daze her somewhat, for she stood with her head held down and her whole attitude bespeaking humiliation.

A hand laid upon her arm was the first intimation that attention was drawn to her, and looking up she saw that old Mr. Thornton had touched her, while she was the cynosure of all eyes. The old man's face was fearful to look upon, for the abduction of his daughter on her wedding night had produced a powerful effect upon him, but Barbara could never be cowed by scowls.

She looked into his face with a dazed expression, but a consciousness of her position was beginning to dawn upon her mind when her eyes swept from face to face and saw only scorn and detestation.

"Woman, this is no place for you. The spot made sacred by the footsteps of my daughter is defiled by your presence. Your being a woman

has saved you from the wrath of myself and these friends. Go!"

The old man spoke in a low voice but he almost reached the sublime in his delivery, for there was a thrilling emphasis in his words.

In an instant the whole manner of the girl changed. Her great, black eyes seemed to fairly scintillate as she threw the old man's hand from her arm, and drew her queenly form erect.

"Silence!" she exclaimed, in a ringing voice, that would have well become a tragedienne, and which startled the good people who looked on in open-mouthed wonder; "silence! It is I who am defiled by remaining where *she* has been. I say it now, once and forever, before you all: Davy Crockett shall never marry that girl, never, never! Make way!"

She passed through the crowd, with her flashing eyes looking defiance, and actually causing the honest folks some confusion; but not a hand was raised to prevent her egress.

She was the daughter of a man not only wealthy, but powerful in politics, and the judge of the district, besides. Then again, it was a woman, and these heroes of the Tennessee backwoods had great respect for the gentler sex.

No sooner had Barbara passed out of the door, and been lost to sight, than another dramatic scene of a thrilling nature ensued. A scuffling sound was heard, and then Rube Long made his appearance through the rear door, pushing before him a form which they readily recognized as the queer parson.

The lank ranger had kept an eye on this worthy, and following him out had, by the aid of a gentle persuader in the shape of a pistol, induced him to return.

His hair was streaming over his face, and the "telescope man"—as Rube was often called on account of his peculiar habit of drawing in his head—had rumbled up his frills, so that his face was well hidden from view.

Now, these honest people did not see through the matter yet. Doubtless the minister had been too easily deceived, but that was no crime, and he was a parson after all.

So exclamations of commiseration arose, and the long hunter grew as red as a turkey-cock in the face. When excited Rube stammered fearfully, and in his efforts to enlighten them he only mixed up matters more.

At length when cries of "shame!" arose, he could stand it no more, but turning to his captive, he gave him a thump that sent the wig and ruff flying.

"T—thar, confound y—you all, d—d—don't you see w—w—what's what?"

Silence ensued.

A remarkable transformation had taken place. Instead of the funny face they expected to see, there was revealed by this act of Rube's, the well known and hated features of Dave Rawlings, the ex-circuit-rider, horse-thief, bandit, and the boon companion of the Border Wolf.

There was a scared look upon his face now, for the man realized that he was in a crowd, the atmosphere of which was rather bad for his health, and more than once he cursed under his breath for coming unarmed to the backwoods wedding, although he had enjoyed the joke of personating Parson Truelove—who, in reality, had never received the message sent—until Davy's act had caused this tremendous denouement.

For quite a time the settlers had owed this man a debt, and the accumulated amount seemed likely to be now settled, interest and all.

His name passed from lip to lip among the men, and stern glances were cast upon the man, who writhed in such a helpless way in the grasp of Rube Long.

Then one of the guests spoke.

He was a backwoods farmer, a man of some wealth, and who had always been looked upon as a leader in political matters, second only to Judge Warner.

"Neighbors," said old Simon Cross, with one eye shut as he squinted from the cowering wretch, along the line of faces, "we came here to attend a wedding, and having been cheated out of that, I move for one that we turn in and have some other amusement. This wretch you all know. There ain't a man in the county who has done more individual damage, and I reckon I'm as much a loser in the boss line as the next, ever since he and his friends run off my gray mare and Old Reliable, my blooded stallion. Now I move we give him a clean dance on nothing. He's made such a good parson 'twould be a shame not to elevate him to a higher position. Neighbor Lee, have you a rope handy?"

The article was quickly forthcoming, and then a move was made toward the door. At this point the prisoner, now thoroughly alarmed, at-

tempted to break away from his captor, in spite of the threatening pistol held so close to his head, but other strong hands seized upon him, and he was compelled to move along whither they willed.

The female portion of the guests were thus left alone, and they spent the time in discussing the marvelous event that had just been enacted, and the unwomanly conduct of the strange girl, Barbara Warner.

A lantern had been speedily ignited by one of the young men, whose indignation at the trick that had been played upon them was intense. With this light to show them the way, the wedding guests hastened through the strip of forest land until they reached a lonely ravine, where the mournful cry of the owl was the only sound that could be heard.

When the bottom of this weird ravine was reached, they came to a halt. A beech tree grew above their heads, one of its gnarled limbs being some ten feet from the ground.

Over this branch the rope was thrown, and the noose placed around the neck of the doomed man, whose hands had been bound to his sides.

"If you have anything to say, speak quickly. If not you had better say your prayers, for you have only two minutes to live," said old Simon, taking out his big "bull's-eye" watch and holding it near the lantern.

It was a terrible sight, and one which those lookers-on never forgot. The man's face was as white as chalk, and showed no sign of life, save in the rolling eyes and a twitching of the upper lip. They thought he had lost his voice, until old Simon looked up from his watch and announced that the time was over.

Then the wretch, realizing that death was near, broke out into such wild pleadings for mercy that in very pity the old man motioned to his comrades to end the tragedy.

Sturdy arms jerked the ex-circuit-rider off his feet and up to the limb.

The lantern at this instant was accidentally extinguished, so none of them could witness his death-throes, but, after the rope had been fastened below and they moved away out of the ravine they could hear the branch quiver and creak.

Dave Rawlings died hard.

Rube Long walked back to the cabin and stationed himself at the door, looking keenly at the men as they silently entered. Two young backwoodsmen, great friends of Crockett's, whom he touched on the arm, immediately joined him.

"Get your shooting-irons, boys," he said.

Rube was quite cool and collected now, and could speak as plainly as the next man.

He was joined in a few minutes by his two friends. They had just come in from a hunt, these three, and had cleaned up in the Thornton cabin, which would account for their presence at the backwoods wedding with their guns.

Rube moved with them down the road that led through the forest. When a distance from the house he came to a pause, and the others now noticed that he carried the lantern in addition to his rifle.

"Comrades," said he, "you remember we once swore to help Crockett in anything. The time has now come. Davy rushed off without a weapon, and harm may come to him. Thar's a trail here; shall we follow it?"

"To the end, Rube," replied the others.

"Good lads! I knowed I could depend on ye. To the death it is then."

A few minutes later a strange light, a will-o'-the-wisp to all appearances, was moving through the forest, and winding in and out, up the valley and beyond. The trackers were on the trail.

CHAPTER VI. THE CHASE.

THROUGH the dark night flew Davy Crockett and his good horse, out of the forest and on to the road that led to the distant mountains.

No time had been given him for reflection, and all his actions had been from mere impulse. It chanced, however, that in leaping on the first horse he reached, Davy had secured a good mount, and was thus enabled to keep his own in the race.

The giant was mounted on a white steed, a powerful stallion that had been famous before he stole it from the Kentucky farm, and even with its double burden, this animal did not let Davy gain a pace.

The young backwoodsman was in great excitement, and could well be pardoned under the circumstances, but all his efforts to increase the speed of his horse resulted in failure, as the animal was doing its best.

Through the stilly darkness of the night they rushed at headlong speed. Hercules Dan was not far in the advance of his pursuer, but, looking back he could see no sign of him, while Davy, on the other hand, bending forward in the saddle, kept his eyes fastened upon the white horse.

All sight and sound of the cabin in the forest had long since faded away.

At first they had heard the murmur of voices while their horses galloped over the soft dirt road, and between the trees could have seen the glimmer of lights had they chosen to turn their heads, but this was now changed, and they were thundering on toward the hills, intent only upon the one object in view—that of escape on the part of the fugitive, that of capture, with Davy.

The giant did not know who his pursuer was. He had seen a figure leap from the crowd toward the horses that were fastened to the fence, but as he only had a glimpse of this person, and the windows were so filled with the startled guests that no light could find an egress save a long, lance-like strip or two that fell across his path, and revealed him to their gaze, he could not recognize him.

It did not need a very fertile imagination however to hit upon the truth, and as he dashed madly along, the outlaw was revolving the matter in his mind. He could easily invest this desperate pursuer who had followed with such lightning speed, with the features of the bridegroom whom he had, under the orders of Barbara Warner, struck so keenly to the heart—Davy Crockett.

The miles seemed to spin behind them, and as they neared the rugged mountains; the country grew wilder in its topographical features. Although they could not see this, yet the roughness of the road, and the fact that several brawling mountain streams crossed it, through which their horses plunged, indicated this fact.

Davy after awhile realized that he was gaining upon the other, slowly but surely, and his heart gave a throb of delight when this fact finally became manifest. The heavy outlaw was burden enough for the stoutest horse, and when carrying double, even the famous white racer would have to give over in the end to the good nag Davy bestrode.

The backwoodsman, forgetting that he was totally unarmed, and would be no match for such a desperado, began to count the minutes that must elapse before he could come up with the other.

Alas for human calculations.

Before another half-mile had been passed over, the foot-hills of the mountain were gained. From the white horse Davy raised his eyes to his rider—whom he could now see, having drawn that much closer—just in time to hear the report of a pistol, and see the flash that accompanied the detonation.

Instantly his horse fell lame, and went to limping badly, so he knew the leaden messenger had struck the mark it was probably intended for. His heart sunk when he realized that the chase was over as far as following on horseback was concerned.

Then like a reaction his hopes returned. The outlaw after firing the shot that crippled his pursuer, gave a taunting laugh as he understood what had resulted, and turning his steed, plunged in among the trees that grew along the foot of the mountains.

Here his pace would have to be slow, for, although the timber was sparse, still there was a risk of running headlong into a tree, or having his eyes scratched out by the branches.

Might he not yet overtake the outlaw on foot? No sooner thought of than Davy halted his steed, and throwing himself to the ground, plunged into the timber.

The darkness was now intense, but he fought his way on through all, until he thought he must be close to where Hercules Dan had left the road; here he paused to listen.

Not a sound save the sighing of the night breeze through some defile above him, the distant howling of wolves, and the musical murmur of a noisy stream that gurgled along over its pebbly bed not far away.

Poor Davy's heart sunk, but he could not stand idle. Again he rushed forward. Better to be moving in the wrong direction than to stand there doing nothing, while his darling was being carried away by this ruffian.

Once more he came to a pause, and strained his ear to catch the sound of a horse's hoofs cracking through the bushes, but again was he doomed to disappointment.

The bubbling sound that told of the creek's

presence, was more distinct, but beyond this nothing greeted his ears.

Mechanically he made his way toward the stream, without any object in view, only the vague, half-formed hope that the outlaw might take this route as being the least incumbered.

It was easy to find the creek, but not such nice work reaching it, for the bushes grew very thickly at this point. At length, however, he reached a point where he caught the starlight glittering upon the moving water like strands of pure silver.

There was no sign of the giant in either direction. If the thought of using the shallow creek as a roadway had entered his head, he had either already passed by, or was yet to come. Davy fervently hoped it would prove the latter. He would leap from the bank upon the outlaw, before he could draw a weapon, and once let the young backwoodsman get his hands upon the throat of Hercules Dan, and the tiger in him would do the rest.

The minutes slipped past and yet the expected sound did not reach his ears. Davy was in despair. He could do nothing until morning, and Heaven alone knew what would become of Rosebud Thornton by the time he once more got upon the trail of the Border Wolf.

He crouched among the bushes, busily engaged in thought, but all at once he started violently.

From down the stream he had heard the snort of a horse. At least so it seemed to him, although it might have been made by a bear, but Davy had hunted these latter animals too diligently to mistake their signs.

Instantly he was all attention, and his nerves quivered with the excitement of the moment. His ears were bent to catch the slightest sound, and presently he heard a splashing that sounded above the murmur of the stream.

Then human voices reached his ear, and a low laugh. There was more than one person coming up the stream. His heart sunk like lead, for a hope had suddenly sprung up when he first heard the sounds, that was just as speedily extinguished.

Who were they?

His first thought was that some of the guests at the wedding had hastened to follow him, but this idea was quickly dissipated.

The riders came on, their steeds splashing through the water, and moving along as though used to such traveling. Soon through the darkness they loomed before Davy's vision.

There were three of them, all well mounted, and in the darkness the unseen looker-on could not make out their forms distinctly, but he was half inclined to believe that the third rider was a woman.

Could it be Barbara Warner?

She had been dressed as a bride, in white, not an hour before, and this silent figure who rode directly in the rear of the two men, was garbed wholly in black. It hardly seemed possible, and yet Davy was inclined to believe that it was his girl-foe.

Even as he looked they faded from his view, and he was once more alone.

He could hear the splash of the water, however, and the murmur of the men's voices.

"I will follow," he said, suddenly, as if he had decided upon a mental question; "if that be Barbara, then surely I will find my Rosebud. If on the other hand, it is not, these men at least are outlaws, and as the scoundrel came this way, there is a strong probability that he was making for their den, wherever it is. Yes, I will follow, and to the death. That's blood in Davy Crockett that they've stirred up to-night, and when it comes to a rumpus—look out, that's all. I'm off."

CHAPTER VII.

MYSTERY OF THE OLD MILL.

"THE mountain stream fell from rock to rock with a musical murmur that was not unlike a woman's laugh.

At a point where the current was swift and the volume of water sufficient for all purposes, an enterprising settler had established a saw-mill some years previous to the opening of our story.

In conjunction with this he had made a rude mill for grinding corn and wheat, and for awhile he reaped the result of his enterprise. It chanced, however, that hard times came, his customers went to a rival many miles away, and no longer was the merry sound of the humming saw and the grinding millstones heard throughout the livelong day.

Old Jacks grew morose with his decline of for-

tune, and one day the community was startled to hear that he had murdered his wife and then vanished from view. Some were inclined to believe that he had fled after committing the terrible deed, but most of the backwoods people were of the opinion that he had made way with himself.

The mill-race and pond were dragged without any result, but this did not disturb the stand the good people had taken in the matter, as old Jacks was known to be very peculiar and would doubtless select the strangest method he could think of to commit suicide.

Well, the poor old woman was buried and the mill closed up, for old Jacks had no known relatives, and as to any of the settlers taking possession, why they would have been completely horrified at such an idea.

Ignorant as they were for the most part, it was but natural that superstition should rule, and to them the deserted mill soon became a haunted place.

Strange noises had been heard there and even lights seen flashing hither and thither. One man bolder than his fellows, had crawled up to ascertain what the noise meant, and peering through the broken shutter, saw a sight he would not forget to his dying day.

Old Jacks, with a bloody knife in his hand, was chasing his wife around the room, she shrieking, and he cursing. The chairs fell over and at last he caught her. Then the knife was raised, and even as the horrified watcher gazed, spellbound, darkness fell upon the scene; he heard the thud of the knife as it struck home, and a series of shrieks and groans arose from all sides, that made his hair stand on end.

How he got away from the spot he never could tell, but all the money in the world would not tempt him to try the same thing over again. He firmly believed that he had seen the spirits of old Jacks and his wife. There were a few who hinted that he had probably been too intimate with another kind of spirits, but the fellow (in the daytime) took these scoffers to the mill, entered, and found in the living room, a dozen holes in the floor where the knife of the spirit assassin had pierced it, as the tragedy was rehearsed time and again.

So the mill was shunned.

Haunted by evil spirits, it was seldom seen, even at a distance by the settlers, who would go half a mile out of the way almost unconsciously, to avoid it.

It was a mournful sight.

The old wheel that had been wont to roll round and round, throwing the silver drops of water into the sunlight, lay there, a wreck, its iron bands rusted so that they had parted, and the wood-work rotted almost wholly away; what remained was covered with moss that hung in long green streamers down to the water.

It chanced, however, that the old mill was not so much deserted as the good people of the neighborhood chose to believe. The scene, upon which the backwoodsman had looked, had really taken place, but the spirits were two healthy outlaws, dressed to represent the former owners of the mill.

A better rendezvous for a gang of desperadoes could hardly be imagined, for there was little chance of their being found out. Underneath there was a splendid stable for their horses, and there were many holes in which they could hide, should the place ever be attacked, or anyone pay a sudden visit during the daytime.

Through the darkness came three figures on horseback, pressing steadily on to the old mill. The two men dismounted, and the girl leaped to the ground with the grace of one who was born to the saddle.

Then one of the men led the horses away, while the female followed the other. He entered the old mill and struck a light, after which he held it close to the face revealed to him.

"You told us the truth, miss. We will serve you in everything," he said.

It was the face of Barbara Warner that he looked upon. The proud girl was about to follow up the plan she had already begun with such success. There was that in her face that made the man almost recoil; no one would ever dare to utter an insulting word with those black eyes flashing upon him.

How could Heaven have made so fair a form and put such a heart within? Ah! no one knew how her passionate nature had struggled to do right, how the conflict raged terribly at times, but the future would show the true worth of her soul, when the false gilding was rubbed off.

Just then she was in the flush of success, and anything but repentant. Her victim was here, in this old mill, and Davy should never see her

again. This was better than killing him, for he would suffer, ay, a thousand deaths in the loss of his intended bride.

The fair young girl was in her power; there was not a spark of goodness in her, so she told herself, and before many hours Rosebud Thornton would be no more.

Having looked into her face, the man turned, and passing the frame that held the rusty old saw, walked over to a stairway that led to the regions above. This was a sort of loft, which had been fitted up by the outlaws as a place of residence, and they had a means known only to themselves, of leaving it in case of an attack or surprise on the part of the settlers.

Barbara's hand clutched a pistol in the folds of her cloak as she followed up the rickety stairs. The loft was a large place, and at the further end an old lantern shed an uncertain light. Rats ran across the floor at their approach, but Barbara was not timid, although she could not help feeling her flesh creep a little at the thought of what a terrible fate it would be to have these animals attack one who was bound, and helpless to resist.

Over in the corner of this loft, lying upon a rude couch, was Rosebud Thornton. Her white dress was a strange mockery when her present situation was considered. She was still under the influence of the drug, but her eyelids twitched, and she showed other signs of speedily returning to consciousness.

A woman sat upon a stool, and watched her. I have said woman but when that word is taken in its purity, surely she was a blot upon the name.

Wrinkled face and bloodshot eyes, skinny hands with talon-like nails, yellow tusks that protruded from between her bloodless lips; that was what Barbara saw.

"Move aside," she said in an authoritative tone.

The old crone looked up in surprise at being addressed in this way by one of her own sex. She was used to being commanded to do things by men, but by a woman, never! Women have no worse foes than their own sex.

She sprang to her feet, and the long talon-like claws were half-raised as if it was her intention to scratch out the eyes of this girl who ordered her, Queen Mab, to do anything.

Then she felt the black eyes fastened upon her, and drawing her own gaze. What she saw in the wondrous depths of these flashing orbs was never known, but the hands slowly sunk to her sides, and with an inarticulate mumble she hastened to obey.

Queen Mab was subdued.

The man, standing back, had witnessed this scene with no little amazement. He had known the old hag of old, and expected an explosion of some sort, and the result was so wonderful that he gave vent to a low whistle. The battle had been fought and won without a blow.

Barbara knelt beside her victim.

The dim light fell upon the golden hair, and the sweet face so like a child's. Her woman's heart reproached her as she looked.

"I have done wrong. Truly it is not her fault that he loves her, and how can I blame her for loving him, my idol, my king? Why should she suffer? Ay, why should I suffer? It is his work, and yet do I not wring his heart more through her? He loves her, loves this sweet doll's face. She was to take the place that I should have. Oh, my God, how I have dreamed of being ever near him; of seeing his face brighten at sight of me only; of walking side by side with my hero through life. She is in my place.

"But for that, Heaven knows I would not harm her innocent head. There is no choice left; I am a poor storm-tossed thing whom the winds of circumstances buffet about; but I can wring tears of blood from Davy Crockett's eyes, and when that is done, then I care not what becomes of me. Ha! she is awake."

A pair of blue eyes were looking up at her from among the golden strands of hair, and Rosebud struggled to a sitting posture.

She looked around her in a frightened way, and then up at the face above her.

"Oh! where am I?" she said, piteously.

"Do you not remember what I told you, not many days ago? I said you would never be Davy Crockett's bride. At the last minute, while the guests were waiting for the ceremony, you were carried away. There was no wedding; the guests waited but no bride came."

"What are you doing to do with me? I know you hate me, but surely it is not my fault. Tell me, what do you mean to do?"

"The poor girl was terrified; she usually possessed seemed to be a very different person."

flight by the horror of her situation, and the effect of the drug that had been administered to her.

"The waters are deep underneath the deserted mill; you are not to leave her alive."

Coldly the words fell from Barbara's lips, for she had no pity for a crying baby.

"Heaven help me, would you murder me?" cried Rosebud, clasping her hands.

"Put it as you will; I warned you what the result would be. I will make him weep tears of blood before I am done. Why don't you cry, and appeal to me for mercy?"

Rosebud's face had turned very white again, but the look of horror had partly died out of her eyes.

"It would be useless. I am in your power; do with me as you will, and may God in His mercy forgive you. If your heart is not entirely steeled against pity, I pray you, as a woman, not to do this terrible thing. You may have had sisters; in their names I beseech you to pause and consider. Oh, do not stain your soul with such a crime. By the holiest of names, mother—"

"Hush!" cried Barbara, wildly, "why have you mentioned that word? What put it into your heart to stir up the depths of memory that cluster around it? My mother I loved with all the strength of my passionate nature. I would have died for her, willingly, as a child. Oh, if she had but lived, I would not be here now! What have I done? Oh, Heaven! what have I come very near doing? Sainted mother, forgive your erring child, forgive! forgive!"

Then turning suddenly, she caught Rosebud's wrist, while her black orbs shone with tears.

"Girl," she said, "you have conquered me. No harm shall befall you. I will save you for him, and then die."

CHAPTER VIII.

CROCKETT TO THE RESCUE.

THROUGH the darkness of the night a form was creeping toward the deserted mill, where we have followed the Border Wolf and his quarry.

Now and then this person, approaching so stealthily, would stumble over some object, which went to prove that he was unfamiliar with the ground over which he was passing. When within some twenty feet of the building he suddenly crouched behind a bush. At the same instant voices were heard, and from the region underneath the mill, where the horses were kept, came two men.

One of them carried an old lantern, and in him, the unseen man behind the bush recognized Hercules Dan, the Border Wolf. The other was probably the fellow who had been in company with Barbara Warner and her cavalier.

They entered the old mill, and the light could be seen through the cracks, moving upward, until it became apparent that they too had gone to the upper loft.

When all became quiet once more, the form arose from behind the bush, and moved forward to the mill. The darkness lay close, but of course the reader has already guessed that this skulker was no other than Davy Crockett.

He had followed the night riders closely up the creek, and even when at length he lost sight of them, it had already dawned upon his mind like a flash of light, whither they had gone, so that he was able to keep straight on, arriving in time to see the two men come from the little den beneath the mill, and enter the building.

Whether it was best to go around the mill in search of a window or some other like means of ingress, or boldly enter, Davy was at a loss to determine.

In walking about he chanced to look up and saw just what he was in search of. There was a window to the loft, but the outlaws had pasted some paper over the frame, which, however, was devoid of glass. Under this brown curtain there was a space of several inches from which came the light.

This also revealed to him the fact that the shed under which the farmers had been wont to drive with their grists was directly beneath this window, and that he could easily reach the spot.

As the shed was old and dilapidated, extreme caution was necessary in mounting it, lest by an unlucky move he precipitate himself through, and ruin the whole affair.

After some little manipulation, the young backwoodsman managed to gain a point directly under the window. This was only a yard or so above the shed, so that by rising upon his knees he would be able to look through.

Voices reached his ear, voices raised in dispute so it seemed, and in one of them he recognized with a shiver he could hardly account

for, the tones of Barbara Warner, his girl-foe. The other sounded not unlike the voice of the Border Wolf.

Then his two most bitter foes were here, and engaged in dispute. What could be the subject of it? Rosebud without a doubt. From what he had already seen of Barbara, Davy felt sure she would not hesitate at anything so that her plans might be carried out, and in all probability she was now insisting upon the death of the young girl, while the giant, more prudent, resisted her determination.

That is how Davy reasoned.

Then he realized that the object which had drawn him up to this place had not yet been accomplished, so he gradually rose up and peered through the space left open.

He took in the whole scene at a sweeping glance. The old hag being beneath him, was not visible, but the two men with whom the Border Wolf was now in league could be plainly seen, seated on one side and smiling as they watched the drama before them.

Davy's gaze rested lovingly and pityingly upon his darling, as she sat upon the cot, her eyes dilated with fear, and listening to the strange words that were spoken.

Hercules Dan and Barbara stood face to face. The giant had known for some time back who the strange Squire was, who had been with them when Davy entered the cabin through the roof, for they had engaged in her service as was evidenced by the work done this very night at the backwoods wedding. One of them had already paid the penalty with his life, and was at that moment dangling from the limb of the beech tree in the ravine. The other faced Barbara, and there was evidently a meeting of some sort brewing.

The girl's great black eyes were flashing fire, and her gaze seemed to pierce the very heart of the giant, but his manner was dogged.

"You refuse to obey me then?" Barbara was saying when Davy looked in.

"So far I do. We have done your work and earned our reward. So far so good. Now you ask me to return this gal to her father. Not much I don't! In the first place, it would be as much as my neck's worth to show my face to them critters. Secondly, it would be betraying this rest o' our friends here, which I don't mean to do. Then again you said you were going to make way with the gal."

"But I have changed my mind," said Barbara.

"So have I," returned the giant with a leer. Barbara's temper now commenced to show, and for once it was on the right side. She stamped her foot upon the old oaken floor making the planks ring and quiver.

"How dare you speak that way to me? I employed you to carry this girl off; you have done it. Now I order you to release her."

"I refuse. Let there be no more words between us, Miss Warner. Your work has been done; there you should rest satisfied. Now the gal is my property. I have taken a fancy to her pretty face, the more so because she was to be Davy Crockett's bride, and, just as you intended to do, I can hurt him through her."

It was a wonder some of them did not hear the gritting noise that came from outside the window at this juncture. Davy's teeth were ground so fiercely that it seemed as if he never intended getting them apart again, and it was only with a great effort that he restrained himself from leaping into the place without waiting longer.

"What," cried Barbara, "you dare to tell me this, you base hound? Oh that I had my riding-whip here, I would cut your ugly face so that you would never forget Barbara Warner."

"It would be dangerous work, miss, I can tell you. Perhaps it would also be just as well if you called less hard names, for I'm not partial to them. You're as bad as the rest of us, for all you seem to have reformed so suddenly. I don't trust people with black eyes like them of yours; they're too changeable. Who knows but what in five minutes you'll be at the throat of my golden-haired bird yonder."

"Never!" exclaimed Barbara, "I have sworn that she shall not be harmed. It was my hand that tore her from Davy Crockett's side, and mine shall be the power to replace her there. She goes from this place with me."

"You are mistaken; she remains!" said the huge ruffian, coolly.

"Would you dare?" cried the girl.

"Dare? Ha! ha! I hold myself accountable to no man. They hate me enough now to stretch my neck if they laid hold of me, but first catch your rabbit, then cook it. So you see anything I do won't render my hold on life less certain. I

confess my brain was not equal to such a charming plot; 'twas you who planned it all, and hang me, if I am going to see such a neat arrangement fall through for want of a little nerve. I'll serve as captain awhile; and, hark ye, my lady, any harm that comes to little Golden-Hair yonder is through your hands."

"Heaven help me, you are right. It was through my influence that she was brought to this place, and on my head lies all the blame. Be it so, then I will save her with a woman's arm. Rosebud, get up!"

There was a ring in Barbara's voice now. No longer did she look excited; that mood had passed away, and in its stead had come a coolness born of the conviction that whatever followed, the blame rested on her soul, and that only her arm could save the innocent young girl at her side now.

Rosebud gained her feet.

Her face was pale, and she was trembling, but beyond that she showed no signs of fear. Her blue eyes were fastened upon the face of her protectress.

Davy Crockett looked upon this scene in amazement. He could hardly believe that his eyes told him the truth. This girl-foe whose love he had thought turned into the bitterest hate, who had hired assassins to murder him, and then performed this outrage of carrying off his bride and attempting to personate her—this tigress now protecting the girl whom she had sought to destroy, and ready to give her own life in order that the lost bride should once more be restored to his arms!

Was he dreaming? What miracle had been performed? Had a hand from Heaven been laid upon the eyes of the misguided girl and showed her the wrong she was doing?

He was aroused by Barbara's voice, once more raised in anger.

"Stand back! or so surely as there is a sky above us, I will send your soul unbidden, before the judgment bar. Stand back!"

The giant had made a stride forward, though he intended preventing Golden-Hair from following her protectress. Rosebud had shrunk from his glaring, mocking eyes, hiding behind Barbara.

The latter wheeled and faced the Border Wolf. He cared not for the flashing of her eyes or the anger that was visible on her face, but when he found himself looking into the black muzzle of a small, elegantly-mounted derringer, he could not help coming to a full pause.

Davy knew that the critical moment was coming, and he gathered his strength for a leap. The giant dared not move forward, but he motioned to his confederates, who at once awoke to the realization that the game was too deep for Hercules Dan, and that they would have to take a hand in it.

So they moved one on each side of the girl, who tried to keep the three covered with her weapon. Suddenly the giant gave the signal. There was a leap forward on the part of the men, the sharp detonation of the derringer, loud outcries, a shriek from Rosebud, and then a crash as the whole window sash was burst in, and a human form came sailing through the aperture with the grace of a wildcat, crying hoarsely:

"Crockett to the rescue!"

CHAPTER IX.

CLOSE QUARTERS.

EVENTS had followed each other so rapidly, and the new position taken by the girl who had tried her best to injure him and his, was so amazing to Davy Crockett that he had been spellbound as it were, unable to do anything more than gaze through the space that intervened between the rude curtain and the window-edge.

When, however, the combined forces of the enemy were brought to bear upon the brave and defiant girl—who, in protecting his darling, had blotted out all her sinful past and covered herself with glory, in Davy's eyes—then he found his voice and action.

The pistol had been well aimed, and as the report sounded, one of the giant's confederates writhed upon the floor, likely never to get up again.

By this shot Barbara had rendered one of her foes powerless to injure her, but she had also disarmed herself. Rosebud gave several loud shrieks when she saw her champion struggling in the arms of the giant.

It was at this opportune moment that Crockett appeared upon the scene, and above the cries of his young bride, the howls of the unlucky recipient of Barbara's bullet, and the jeering

laughter of Hercules Dan and his remaining confederate arose his shout:

"Crockett to the rescue!"

In passing through the window with such extreme haste, of course Davy could not exercise a due amount of caution. He was compelled to trust to his weight to smash the whole frame in.

So far as this was concerned his expectations were fully realized, for the whole rotten fabric gave way with a crash; but in passing over the wide sill, his foot caught.

The result was not disastrous but it changed the aspect of affairs a little, for Davy, instead of alighting in the open space near the struggling giant, who was endeavoring to take from Barbara the little dagger she had drawn from her dress, fell directly under the window.

The intervening space was short, and his fall was broken, for he came full upon the old crone who was crouching there, watching the fight with a chuckling noise, attesting the interest she took in it.

When Davy came thus suddenly upon her, the beldame must have thought it was the Old Nick after her, at last. She clawed away at him like a wildcat, all the while uttering shrieks that might have emanated from the lips of a madwoman with no discredit.

It was only after several efforts that the young backwoodsman gained his feet, and even then the creature clung to him, tearing his garments with her talon-like finger-nails. With an exclamation of anger and disgust he threw her aside, and huddled up in a bunch she remained in the corner, thinking herself hidden from the Evil Spirit.

By this detention the aspect of affairs had been materially altered. Both the Border Wolf and his companion had now recognized Davy Crockett, and naturally they thought he must have friends close at hand.

The giant hurled Barbara to one side and tried to pull a pistol, while the young girl clung to his arm with a determination that was just like Barbara Warner. She who had been so eager for Davy's death was now the one to risk her life for him and his. Surely she was atoning, poor girl, for her sin.

The other ruffian laid toward Rosebud as if to carry her off, for if she was of no other use to them, they could buy their ultimate safety with her life.

Davy had by this freed himself and leaped forward as if he were a whirlwind breaking from the mountain fastnesses and speeding out over the prairie.

Hercules Dan was in a bad position to meet an attack, for he was still vainly endeavoring to pull his pistol while Barbara clung to his arm like a vise.

Davy struck him a terrific blow with his clenched fist. All the fury that had been raging in the heart of the young backwoodsman, was concentrated in that hearty shot, straight from the shoulder.

The giant reeled and fell, and Barbara let go her hold just in time to avoid a share in his catastrophe.

Leaping past his fallen adversary, Crockett made for the other scoundrel, who saw him coming and whipped out his knife. With this he made a vicious stroke, and that he failed to put an end to Crockett then and there, was neither his fault nor Davy's, for the first struck with a savage vigor, and the second rushed on, heedless of the threatening blade.

With his usual good luck, Davy escaped serious injury. The knife slipped along his arm, cutting the sleeve of his coat and drawing blood, but beyond this it did him no injury, and before the fellow could repeat his thrust or even recover from it, Crockett had closed.

Once those muscular arms, nerved by the desperation of the moment to superhuman efforts, closed around him, and the man's doom was sealed, although, of course, it was not yet apparent.

He was a wiry fellow, possessing much strength, but Crockett had him foul, and unless there was an interference, it was only a matter of time between them. As they thrashed about, the lantern was kicked over and extinguished, and the darkness of death settled upon the loft in the old haunted mill.

Then Davy heard a cry and a half-smothered snarl, followed by a shuffling sound as if some one were going down the stairs in the dark. What must be the truth broke in upon his mind. The Border Wolf had recovered from the blow he had dealt him, and was carrying off one of the girls. Which one it was, he could only allow his fears to judge.

His arms now became like bands of steel, and

the fellow was but a plaything in his grasp. Down they went with a crash that shook the rotten boards. Davy was on top, and in the twinkling of an eye he had possessed himself of the outlaw's knife.

There was a dull sound heard, a bubbling cry that ended in a shriek, and as a light suddenly flashed up Davy arose from his victim, to look into the face of Barbara Warner who had ignited the wick in the lantern.

Rosebud was not to be seen!

Davy gave a gasping cry, for he understood the situation. The brawny giant had picked up the young girl as though she were a mere feather, and had carried her off. Hers had been the cry he heard. How his heart sunk with the thought that his work and the noble devotion of Barbara Warner had been for naught.

But could he not yet pursue?

The very thought sent the blood leaping madly back to his pale face, and his hands clenched as though the Border Wolf were already within his grasp.

He made a step forward.

Perhaps Hercules Dan had not gotten far away, as it hardly seemed a minute since he had heard that cry.

Davy took a step forward.

As he did so, Barbara Warner put her hand upon his arm, and while he turned to look at her in surprise, she uttered in a sad tone the words:

"Too late!"

Then Crockett, too, heard the sounds of a horse's hoofs beating upon the turf, and he knew that the giant was off, bearing his precious Rosebud with him.

What was to be done?

While these two stood there undecided how to act, the neigh of a horse rung out, and was immediately succeeded by a loud laugh of triumph that made Davy's blood leap like molten lava through his veins.

Then the sounds became indistinct and died away upon the night air. The Border Wolf had again flown.

Davy turned to Barbara. He found her trembling under his gaze as she had not done before the anger of the giant and his friends, for her guilty thoughts, and the harm she had done this man burned like coals of fire in her heart.

"Barbara," said Davy, "give me your hand."

"How dare I, Davy Crockett? After what has passed I wonder you would touch it," she said, in a mournful tone.

"Give it to me, Barbara. Whatever wrong you have done me and mine, it was nobly wiped out when you stood over my darling and defended her against that fiend. Hereafter we are brother and sister, do you hear Barbara? You must let me give you a brother's love and devotion. Oh! if you had but shown your true nature, if you had been true to yourself, years ago, it might have been as you wished, Barbara!"

The girl trembled like an aspen leaf as her hand was clasped in his. There seemed some strange electricity in his grasp that disturbed her whole being. By a great effort however, she controlled this feeling and turning her face away so that this noble man might no longer read the secret written in scarlet upon it, she said:

"Do not think of me, Crockett; I was sadly mistaken in my feelings, that was all. Think only of the pure young girl that villain has carried off so basely. Instant pursuit must be made. Have you any idea where he would be likely to aim for?"

"Yes, and not another minute must be lost. Do you return, Barbara, and send some of my friends to the Devil's Perch. They will be in time to help me perhaps."

"Must I go back?" she asked, sadly, as he paused on the top of the old stairs.

"It is better so. After all, you are only a woman. Good-by, sister Barbara, and Heaven bless and forgive you."

He was gone.

She stood there buried in thought, heedless of the eyes of the old crone being fastened upon her. Presently she heard Davy riding away, and then looked up. An expression of determination was written on her face.

"Ah! Crockett," she murmured, "I will not go back. I will follow, and if harm comes to you, I will die beside you—brother Davy."

CHAPTER X. THE FIRE-TRACKERS.

"We are close to the haunted mill."

The words were uttered in a low voice, as though the speaker was not disinclined to be-

lieve the stories that had been told of the old place, and had an abiding faith in its spectral inhabitants.

"I know it, Tom," returned his companion, the man who held the lantern in one hand and a long rifle in the other. "I know it just as well as you, but I'll follow Rube to the end of the world if Davy Crockett are thar. Them's my feelings."

"Here's Rube. He may have some news; I hope so, any way," said the first.

A tall form now loomed up in the faint light cast by the lantern, and which turned out to be no other than Rube Long.

"Boys," said he, earnestly, "thar's no use talking; that old mill ain't on the squar'. I've had an idea that it needed investigating for a long time back, but I never could screw my courage up to the p'int. Now I move we see what this thing means."

"We're with you, Rube, but from your words I should judge you'd seen something."

"Ye're quite right, boys. I knowed we was close to the mill when I left you, and it was to squint around that I did go, tho' I never let on to you. Wal, I crawled over the hill yonder, down into the valley, and up the ravine until I got mighty close; then I grew cautious like."

"Seemed to me I heard a hoss going off while I was creeping over the hill, but it may have been imagination just as we accused Tom here a while back when he declared he heard shouts away off in this direction."

"Pretty soon I could see a light atween the trees. Then it growed interesting, and I own up I was a little skittish about going on, but I sat down and thought it over."

"Thar's one thing," says I to myself, and that is the plain truth, 'that spirits don't need no light to see by.' Then again, these pesky critters that rode up the creek, warn't afraid to come straight here, and why should I? Ain't Rube Long got as much grit as a tarnal hoss-thief?"

"That settled it, comrades, and thar wasn't anything that could turn me back after I had convinced myself. So I crept on again."

"When I had gone up close to the old mill, I seen the light was in the loft. Just then, through the windy, I had a glimpse of a regular ole witch. I only saw her a half-minute and couldn't sw'ar that she had her broomstick along or not, but thar she was."

"I wasn't scared, boys, but I kinder thought it would be better for the hull of us to move on the old witch and her den, together, so if you are ready, we'll start at once."

The others declared their willingness to be led forward. They placed an emphasis on the last words, that gave the long hunter to understand that he was expected to do any arduous task which the future might discover and unearth.

So the bold trio advanced.

Rube took them over the same path he himself had used, and when the hill was left behind them, there only remained the level tract of forest and then the ravine, down which came the stream.

"Look," said Tom, suddenly, as he came to a full pause, "thar's a bright light ahead comrades. Rube, don't it come from the direction of the old mill?"

"You are right, Tom, but what in thunder does it mean?"

As the long hunter asked himself this question, he put his hand above his eyes and looked earnestly toward the mill. There were many trees between it and them, and in the daytime it would have been a hard task to discover the building, but they could catch a glimpse of what appeared to be a tongue of flame darting upward.

This sight affected the hunters somewhat, for they were all superstitious.

"The witches are having a dance," suggested Tom.

"They don't need a light for that, so Rube said. What do you make of it, old partner?" asked the third hunter.

"I'd like to take my oath, boys, that the old mill's on fire," declared Rube, suddenly, to the surprise of his friends.

"By George, it's the truth. Thar's no use in our holding back, then. Whar a fire starts, you'll find human beings, and it's time we was investigating," Tom said.

The others being of the same mind a move forward was made. Reaching the ravine they commenced ascending. By this time the truth of Rube's words had become apparent to all of them, for the old mill was occasionally in view, and they could see the flames breaking through the roof.

Although the fire certainly seemed real enough, so much mystery had been invested in

this old building that the hunters could not help speculating as to whether it might not be a spectral one, after all.

They had heard of cases where houses were burned completely down before the eyes of parties, who, upon the following day found the building intact and showing no sign of having been in the flames.

"Look, thar's the witch."

The others followed the direction of Rube's extended arm. This brought their gaze to the window in the loft through which we saw Davy plunge, taking sash and all with him.

Sure enough a human face was to be seen, or rather the features of a witch, for the old crone might have passed for the remarkable hag of Endor.

The glare of the flames fell upon her ugly features, and lighted them up without adding any beauty. There was a weirdness about the sight that held the three hunters spellbound, and they stood like statues, gazing upon the burning building and the terrible creature who seemed to have not the slightest fear of what the inevitable consequences would be should she remain where she was.

Whether she caught sight of them or not they could not say, but suddenly she uttered the wild scream of a maniac and vanished from view.

At this point Rube announced his intention of climbing upon the shed, and looking into the burning building, for, as the outlaws had come directly to this place, there might be something seen to connect them with the fire that was now destroying the old haunt.

His comrades offered no opposition, but, moving up a little closer to the house, they watched the progress both of the flames and their leader's attempt.

Those below saw him look in, and then give an exclamation of surprise that could be heard above the crackling of the flames. Then he bent still further over the ledge, as if examining some object that had caught his eyes.

"Look!" exclaimed Tom, "the old witch has attacked him. By the Heavens above us she is trying to pull Rube in so that he may perish in the flames. Your rifle is surer than mine, Jack; put a bullet through her ugly head and save Rube."

That individual was capable of saving himself, however. The crazy crone had assailed him savagely, uttering shrill cries, and trying her level best to drag him into the mill, so that she might have company in her warm quarters.

She had assailed the long hunter at an unguarded moment, for he was intently surveying the bodies upon the floor, and trying to picture the true state of affairs in his mind.

Rube, once he got to work, found no difficulty in throwing her off, and as the old hag returned to the assault, he lost his footing and went sliding down the inclined roof of the shed.

The hunter landed with a thump upon the ground, and rejoined his comrades. His face was scratched somewhat, and he felt sore after his fall, but otherwise he was all right.

"Boys, thar's been desperate work done in that old mill. Two critters lie thar stone dead, but thar ain't a livin' soul to be found 'cept that old hag. My opinion are that Davy has been here ahead of us and got his best licks in. 'Twould be just like him. Now, the question arises, what's become of the gal, Davy, and them o' the outlaws an' hoss-thieves what got away? My idea are that Crockett didn't gain his end, an' is still in pursuit. If this is the truth, then thar's work for us yet. That fire shows up mighty well, an' we might be s'archin' for tracks. They'll tell the hull tale."

It was done as Rube suggested, and shortly the plain trail of Crockett was found, which they readily recognized. Then the whole story unfolded itself—all but the part in which Barbara had turned herself into a heroine; that, of course, they knew nothing about.

Once more was the lantern brought into service, and the three hunters took up the trail of the Border Wolf, which was plainly marked. They saw that the three horses were all going different ways, and picking out the one most heavily laden as that belonging to Hercules Dave, they left the old mill behind them.

Higher rose the greedy flames, licking up the dry wood as if it was tinder. At length there was a great crash, a hissing of water and fire coming in contact, and the mill was gone. Under the ruins, the mad crone found a grave with the dead outlaws.

CHAPTER XI.

BIRDS OF PREY.

The night was far advanced.

For many hours old Jupiter had led the

march of the bright heavenly constellations across the firmament, and now the morning star arose in all its purity.

Miles away from the haunted and now destroyed mill, the hills rose abruptly, again forming themselves into a mountain range, at whose base the forest stretched away.

Almost limitlessly facing this forest was the spot known as Devil's Perch—a singular formation known far and wide over the country. As this spot had long served as a rendezvous for such men as the Border Wolf, perhaps that had something to do with its title.

It was a broad ledge with a shelter at the rear from the rocks above assuming a peculiar shape, by projecting several yards as they rose.

Back of the ledge the mountain sprung up abruptly for fifty feet, and this wall was deemed inaccessible. In front lay a terrible gulf. The rocks at the foot of this height were fully a hundred and fifty feet below the ledge, so that a fall would crush the unlucky one to death in an instant.

There was only one known way of reaching the ledge, and this was by a small canyon that led up to it through the massive rocks at one side. One man, well armed, could hold out against an army, so an observer would naturally think; but it was not so, as the spot where the exit from the narrow canyon had to be guarded, was in sight from above, and marksmen could have picked off the defender.

Some fifteen feet above the ledge, a tree jutted out from the wall, dead and lonely. Its limbs had, one by one, fallen, some upon the ledge, others into the gulf that opened beyond.

Upon the ledge in question, at this late hour of the night, a fire was smoldering. It had been formed from the twigs and branches from the old tree.

At times this would start into a fitful blaze, and upon such occasions the occupants of the ledge were revealed.

A man lay upon his back, with his head resting upon a knapsack. He was sound asleep, and snored lustily at times. The firelight revealed an ugly face, covered with red hair, and he looked just what he was, an outcast from the settlements, one whose hand was raised against all men, and who was hunted wherever he was found.

Close beside him lay an immense yellow dog, sturdily built, and with an expression upon his square face almost as ugly as his master's.

The brute all at once raised his head and listened; then came a low but vicious growl, but the man moved not. The brute got up, and putting his muzzle close to the face of his master, repeated the sound.

This time the man raised his head.

"Hullo! what's up, Beauty? Thar's something in the wind, in course. Ha! I caught it, then. Good dorg," and he patted the brute's head, for there was a certain affection between them, although this manifested itself occasionally, on the part of the man, in kicks and blows.

The night breeze now brought the sounds more distinctly to his ear.

"A single hoss coming over Big Bar ford. Thar ain't much danger, but we'll lie low. He's comin' hyar; probably one of the boys; perhaps Dan himself. I'll watch out for him."

The red-bearded outlaw took up his station upon the ledge just where the little canyon debouched upon it. From this point he would have the new-comer at his mercy, and that with Red Dick generally meant the compassion exhibited by the wolf toward its prey.

Louder grew the sounds.

Then they ceased abruptly for the man had drawn rein at the foot of the pass and was evidently about to ascend it on foot.

This almost convinced the outlaw that the conjecture he had formed was true, and that it was a confederate.

He would soon know, at any rate, as the new-comer could now be heard ascending the narrow canyon, puffing and blowing as he came.

"Hercules Dan, my word on it," muttered the red-bearded man.

Presently a figure stalked out from the pass, leading a second one. The firelight fell upon the well-known form and features of the giant, but Red Dick stared in amazement at seeing him leading a girl dressed in white and evidently his captive.

Poor Rosebud!

This had been indeed a terrible night for her, and it was the same to which she had looked forward as the happiest of her life, for was she not to be united to the idol of her heart?

Her pretty face was pale, and a look of despair haunted her blue eyes. Had the giant been

given a chance to observe her closely, he might have noticed that, back of this there was an expression of fierce determination which told that the young girl, if the worst came, would not hesitate to throw herself from the ledge into the gloomy gulf below.

Red Dick sprung up and greeted the giant warmly. They were old comrades and had on more than one occasion stolen horses in company from the settlers of Kentucky, and joined hands in other similar risky undertakings.

Rosebud was directed to take up her position under the shelving rock that jutted out as I have said, in such a remarkable manner. To reach the canyon she would have to pass by the two men so that escape was utterly out of the question.

How the poor girl's spirit sunk as she sat there, alone, in the hands of these lawless and desperate men!

She heard the giant telling his story to the other, and could not help listening to it for the name she loved so well occurred so frequently. Dan gave Crockett all the honor due him when he acknowledged that the hunter was a perfect dare-devil, whom he feared more than any three men on earth.

Red Dick listened in silence.

As yet he had never had anything to do with the young backwoodsman, and the thought entered his mind that perhaps it would be wise to avoid the encounter, seeing that it had proved so disastrous to so many of Dan's comrades, but he dismissed this thought as unworthy of his well known daring character.

Besides, the giant seemed to take it for granted that he might depend on him for assistance, should it be needed, so Red Dick determined to put on a bold face and make out as though he was anxious to cross blades with this young backwoodsman who was following on the giant's trail with all the impetuous fury of a female panther deprived of its young.

"I'd like to meet this Crockett, sometime, Dan. Red Dick has yet to see the man what can lay him on his back. Thar, now, don't flare up; ye know I allers except you. He's been playin' the mischief with the boys generally, and if I could avenge 'em by laying him cold, I reckon I'd do it."

"You may have the chance then, sooner than ye expect, for as sure as you live, thar's Davy Crockett comin' now!"

As the giant uttered these words, the night wind bore to their ears the clatter of a horse's hoofs that had just crossed Big Bear ford. Rosebud's heart began to throb wildly. Davy was coming! he would yet save her, for how could such courage and daring fail to overcome all obstacles?

With the two men, the case was a little different. They were armed and desperate, and if the young backwoodsman braved them in their den, he would be coming to his doom.

With a savage determination written on their brutal faces, they secreted themselves among the rocks and waited like birds of prey.

CHAPTER XII.

INTO THE DEPTHS.

"BACK, Davy, back!"

As this shout rung out upon the clear night air, the sound of an imprecation was heard, quickly succeeded by the ringing report of a rifle, but Red Dick knew that he had not hit his mark, for the figure seen so dimly in the narrow pass, had leaped behind a projecting rock, even before he fired, but his finger had been upon the trigger, and for the life of him he could not have kept back that shot.

The bullet was indeed wasted, and flattened out against the rocky wall further down the canyon, for Crockett had sprung to one side upon realizing his danger when the warning reached his ears in Rosebud's well-loved voice.

"Curse the girl," muttered the red outlaw, while the giant snickered, and the great yellow hound showed his ugly pangs with a growl, as though sympathizing with his master's failure.

The silence of death brooded over the lonely place. Red Dick reloaded his rifle and then waited eagerly for some sign of the intrepid young backwoodsman, who would probably have fallen with a bullet in his brain but for the warning of Rosebud.

This was the first encounter the red outlaw had ever had with Davy, and it was not opening auspiciously. Nevertheless he was fully determined that he would yet show the giant his hated enemy was nothing more than mortal.

So he crouched among the rocks, his blood-shot eyes glaring down the canyon, eager to make out the first approach of Crockett, while

beside him lay the yellow dog, occasionally raising his head to utter a growl or show his glistening teeth.

Meanwhile the object of all this scrutiny was hidden by the rocks that formed the bend in the canyon.

That abrupt shot, and the flattening of the bullet against the rock behind him, worked like magic upon the young bear-hunter, and he realized that unless he exercised more caution the chances were that he would yet go under and all be lost.

He had crafty foes to deal with—for it did not take him long to discover that the giant had a comrade with him, as they exchanged words even while Red Dick was reloading his gun, and the only way to overcome them would be to use strategy in return, which Davy determined to do.

The minutes sped by.

Looking down the canyon the two men could see their enemy should he attempt to crawl toward them, of this they felt sure, and as there was no other means of reaching the ledge, they were not much afraid that Davy would surprise them.

Daylight would be at hand in another half-hour, when it would be policy in them to leave their present quarters, for doubtless some of the settlers would start upon the trail as soon as it was light enough to be discovered, and three or four hours would bring them to the scene of action.

But Davy was not the man to remain idle. He crouched behind the rock, after escaping the murderous bullet of Red Dick, for several minutes. This was not the first time he had been at Devil's Perch. During his hunts he had once found himself in the vicinity of the famous rendezvous, and had paid it a visit out of sheer curiosity.

During this time the ledge had no occupants, so Davy was enabled to examine it to his heart's content, never dreaming that in gratifying his curiosity he was doing himself a great benefit in the time to come.

With the two outlaws crouching at the top of the canyon it would be a very difficult thing to approach them unobserved, but Crockett was desperate enough to make the attempt.

Flattened out upon the cold rock that formed the bed of the canyon, he made his way upward inch by inch, with the noiseless powers of a snake, and the two men knew nothing of his approach.

Before the young backwoodsman left the haunted mill, he had secured a rifle, and a long-bladed knife. The rifle he left behind the rock that had sheltered him, but, the knife he had between his teeth.

Fortunately for the success of his enterprise, the fire had been burning lower every minute, and the canyon becoming darker. If the treacherous flame should take a sudden notion to blaze up, all would be lost.

Israel Putnam's crawling into a wolf's den could not have been a more daring feat than this of Crockett's. Above him crouched two murderous fiends, one of whom he knew to be a man of herculean mold. They were well armed, and would not hesitate to throw themselves upon him.

Yet with only a knife, Davy Crockett went to meet them, and braved them in their lair. Before many minutes had passed by, the lofty shelf of rock would be the scene of another terrible struggle.

The two outlaws were possessors of extraordinarily sharp ears, and might have been suspicious of every sound, but Davy failed to make any that would have betrayed him.

Besides, who would have imagined for an instant that he intended attacking them in such a reckless manner?

If the men did not, the dog knew and appeared so uneasy, uttering short little growls and snuffing at the air, that Red Dick became a little apprehensive, himself.

As it seemed impossible for Davy to come up the canyon, the outlaw twisted his neck and scanned the ledge behind him. The fire was almost wholly out, only a few living embers giving evidence of its former usefulness.

From this point the fellow turned his gaze upward to where the old dead tree jutted out from the cliff, and the rugged rocks projected in such wild confusion. Of all the outlaws who frequented Devil's Perch, Red Dick was the only one who had as yet suspected that the cliff could be descended by a daring man.

He had never given utterance to this suspicion, but it broke upon him uneasily as he crouched there, rifle in hand, and knew from Beauty's actions that the dare-devil young back-

woodsman was approaching from some quarter.

Before many minutes had gone by, he was to find out where the danger lay, but it would be upon him without further warning.

Even as he lay there, twisting his neck and anxiously scanning the face of the cliff, as seen in the gathering gloom, a dark form arose in the air, and leaped over the rock behind which the outlaw and his dog were crouching!

It was the graceful, terrible leap of a panther. Hercules Dan, more watchful than his comrade, so far as the canyon was concerned, saw Crockett spring to his feet, and whirling his pistol around, fired.

The dull crack boomed out, echoing among the gorges beyond, but the shot had been too sudden to be successful. True, the bullet touched Davy and drew blood, but did no harm.

Crockett had taken his knife in his hand before taking that flying leap over the rock, and was ready for business.

Red Dick had no time to aim his rifle; indeed, he could not even rise to his feet, before the hunter landed beside him.

If he was slow, however, the dog was not, for it made a vicious leap at Crockett, just as he landed upon the rock. A stunning kick from Davy's foot sent the animal rolling over and over.

By this time Red Dick had bounded to his feet and thrown himself upon the bold hunter.

He did not attempt to draw his knife, but hoped to seize upon and hold Davy until the giant could put an end to matters.

The young hunter was stronger than he had expected, and the two, wrapped in a close embrace, staggered out upon the platform, and dangerously near the edge of the rock.

Hercules Dan drew a pistol and waited, preferring to let his comrade fight it out alone, and preparing for the issue. The dog, however, was more energetic, for, suddenly plunging in, he seized a leg between his teeth, and held on for dear life, ignorant of the fact, that, in his haste, he had grasped his master's limb.

The contestants knew not where they were going, and at last, what might have been expected, occurred.

Rosebud, standing with clasped hands, uttered a cry that ended in a shriek, for suddenly Davy, the red outlaw, and the savage dog, missing their footing in the gloom, toppled over the edge, and shot downward into the depths of the terrible gulf that yawned like a huge grave, prepared to receive them.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FORM FROM THE DEAD.

EVEN Hercules Dan could not repress a cry of horror when he saw this terrible catastrophe occur. He arose from his position while the two combatants were yet struggling, and stood near them, deliberately awaiting his chance to put a bullet through Crockett's head, even if he had to see his comrade Red Dick die first at Davy's hand.

He stood like a rock as Rosebud's shriek rung out. No sound greeted his ears telling him that the bodies of the unhappy men had landed upon the rocks below, for no doubt the distance was too great.

When Rosebud sprung to the edge to look over, the giant was before her, and, thinking she intended leaping into the black depths in despair, he pushed her back.

Then he cast a hasty glance down; nothing met his gaze, however, save the intense darkness, which mortal eye could not pierce for a distance of ten feet.

The giant was not allowed time to make a discovery which a torch held over the edge might have shown him.

While his eyes were naturally turned downward, something caught his eye that seemed more like a Will-o'-the-wisp than anything else. Far down among the trees it was to be seen, moving steadily along, now lost to sight and anon flashing out again.

At first the superstitious villain felt a cold chill run through his frame, for a wild idea had entered his mind that the spirits were hunting for the souls of the two men who had fallen from the ledge.

All at once, however, he burst out into a hoarse laugh, as if the utter absurdity of this idea had now fully struck him. The light had now reached the foot of the little canyon, which ascended after the shape of a bent bow, so that each terminus was plainly visible from the other.

"Some one on my trail! Who can it be? They've got a lantern—probably old Thornton's.

That means enemies! I'll give 'em a warm reception, so that they won't forget the Wolf of the Border in a hurry," he growled.

Rosebud heard her father's name mentioned, and another terror came to thrill her heart. She had seen her lover go to his death; was she now fated to witness the same terrible fate with regard to her father? Was this monster fated to slay all whom she held dear?

Why could she not warn these friends as she had done Davy? The effort was well worth trying at any rate.

So she crept along the wall as far as she dared until she could see the outlines of the outlaw. In passing the fire he had given it a kick that started some of the embers into fresh life, so that the ledge was no longer wrapped in complete darkness.

The minutes passed slowly.

Rosebud strained her ears, but not a sound reached them. She knew, however, that her friends were ascending the narrow canyon, and that when they passed a certain rock that jutted out, the scoundrel above would send his deadly bullet down.

Hercules Dan had possessed himself of Red Dick's rifle, and with this he intended ridding himself of at least one pursuer.

Unconscious of the straining eyes that were watching his every movement, he glared down the canyon, anxious for the first glimpse of the coming foe.

All at once Rosebud saw him raise the rifle to his shoulder. From this she knew he had caught a sound that failed to reach her ears, and which told him those he awaited were near at hand.

As his head was lowered to the stock as if to take aim, Rosebud's voice rung out wildly, repeating the warning she had given to Davy when he was ascending, and which had doubtless saved his life.

The man who had been seen around the bend, sprung back like a flash before the leveled rifle could sound his death-knell, and the giant, turning, with an oath aimed the weapon at the girl, as if tempted to silence her tongue forever.

He appeared to think better of this, however, for the gun was once more swung around, and aimed down the canyon. Who the attacking party was, he knew not, but his guilty conscience told him that some of the guests at the backwoods wedding, so rudely disturbed by his running off with the bride, had trailed him, and now the wolf was cornered.

His situation was beginning to look dangerous, for the day would be breaking in less than an hour, and then it would be utterly impossible to leave his present quarters.

So long as he had Rosebud his prisoner, he was safe from their vengeance, provided they did not pick him off with a rifle, and he determined to keep an eye upon the young girl all the while.

The minutes slipped on.

A profound silence reigned down the canyon, and one could hardly believe deadly foes lurked there, ready for the fray.

Remembering how Davy had crawled up almost under their noses, unperceived, the giant determined that these new foes should not do the same without meeting a bullet from his rifle, and he kept a strict watch upon the dark line along which Crockett had crawled.

Perhaps five minutes had passed in this way when a voice hailed him, coming from behind the rocks in the canyon.

"Hullo, up thar!"

Thinking that this was simply a device to make him betray his position, the giant remained silent, waiting to hear if the enemy had anything else to say.

"Hercules Dan, you know me, Long Rube. I want to talk with you," came the voice out of the gloom.

"So it's you, are it? Well, talk away and be hanged," said the giant.

"You have the girl there?" queried the backwoodsman, anxiously.

"Correct," replied the giant.

"Where is Davy Crockett?"

"He and a friend of mine, Red Dick by name, took a notion to jump over the edge here, and commit suicide together. I reckon ye'll find 'em at the foot with their arms locked around each other, as lovin' as two babes in the wood."

Exclamations of horror arose from those below; then Rube spoke again:

"Give up the girl, and ye can go scot free. Refuse and we'll never drop your trail till the end of time. Choose, and be quick about it too, for ye know we ain't the kind o' men to waste time."

The huge ruffian laughed loud and long, as if he was highly amused.

"I'm safe enough, thank ye! I don't intend givin' up the gal. 'Twa'n't my game a-kidnap-pin' her, but now that I've done it I've taken such a fancy to her purty face that I'm going to keep her. I had a wife once, but she died, an' this gal will take her place. Now ye know what I mean to do, so go to work, but let me warn ye, that I'll be the death o' the lot if I have half a chance."

There was no answer to his bold defiance; silence had once more come upon those in the canyon, who were evidently consulting as to their future operations.

The giant lay there among the rocks, ready to meet his enemies whenever they chose to put in an appearance, but he was more troubled than his words had indicated, for although he did not fear Rube Long as he had Crockett, still the hunter was known to be a cunning man, and he had comrades to back him up in any desperate plan he might set about performing.

Several times Dan twisted his neck and looked back along the shelf. The fire still smoldered, and by the faint light he could see Rosebud crouching by the rocks. It was while his eyes were turned upon her that he heard her give vent to a low cry, and saw that she was gazing with dilated eyes at the edge of the shelf where Davy and Red Dick had plunged over, together with the savage hound.

To the amazement of the giant he saw the figure of a man slowly rising above the rock, and coming out of the gloomy depths.

At first he could only imagine that it was the ghost of Davy Crockett come back from the spirit world for vengeance, and his limbs began to tremble at the thought. Then he saw the form crawl up the ledge.

Just at this opportune moment, as if to reassure the shaking villain, the fire flared up. It was only for a few seconds, but this was long enough for Hercules Dan to recognize in the other, his friend and henchman, Red Dick.

It was indeed the tiger who had plunged over the edge of the shelf into the unknown depths, in Crockett's arms. He seemed alive and well, and but for a bloody mark upon the head where his frontispiece had come in contact with the rocks, appeared uninjured by the fall.

When the giant fully realized that this seeming spirit was no other than his friend, he was overjoyed, for his being alone, and brought face to face with several foes, had begun to make him a little scary.

The outlaw in falling had landed upon a ledge that lay some ten feet from the top. He was stunned into unconsciousness, but before losing his senses altogether he remembered hearing some heavy body whirling downward through space, which was, undoubtedly, no other than his late antagonist, Davy Crockett.

He did not know how long he lay upon the shelf, but when he opened his eyes again he came very near rolling off. It took a full minute to realize where he was, and then he sought a way to the platform above.

This he readily found in the shape of a rough path that had evidently been used by some animal, a bear most likely, in passing from one ledge to the other.

It was easy enough to make his way to the top, where his abrupt appearance rather startled his companion in crime. At any rate they could congratulate themselves on the fact that their worst enemy was put beyond all chance of hurting them.

CHAPTER XIV.

DAVY DARES ALL.

DAVY CROCKETT was not dead, however.

Hercules Dan and his friend made a little mistake when they calculated upon that as a point in their favor. At any rate, for a dead man he exhibited a remarkable amount of liveliness just about the time they were talking about him, and chuckling over his demise.

Davy had also fallen upon the ledge, but as he was on top of the outlaw, he was not even as much injured as Red Dick.

The latter was perfectly correct in saying that some object went whizzing past, down into the depths, but this was nothing less than his own yellow dog, Beauty.

How the outlaw became ignorant of the fact that Davy had fallen upon him can be readily explained. His head struck the rock and he was very much confused so that he immediately sunk into a state of somnolency that lasted almost ten minutes.

Davy was hardly injured at all by the fall, except in having the breath pretty well knocked out of him.

Fearing lest he should be discovered by the giant, who he imagined would look over the edge above with a lighted torch, Crockett crawled away.

All he had to guide him was his hands, for darkness, as black as that mythical river the Styx over which Charon waits to ferry departing souls, surrounded him on all sides.

A mistake might precipitate him into the terrible gulf from which he had just been saved, almost by a miracle, as it seemed, when death had been to all appearances certain.

The young backwoodsman was by nature daring and reckless. We have seen him in situations where most men would have stood appalled, but where he stood as cool and unconcerned as though he was making a speech at the fair.

This abrupt fall had, however, disturbed his usual equanimity. He could feel his nerves quivering from the shock of reeling over and falling to what seemed a certain and terrible death, and then being brought up so suddenly upon the ledge below.

He crawled on.

The ledge was much wider than it had ever looked from above, for the simple reason that the wall retreated, and the whole of it could not be seen from the platform.

That his late antagonist still lived, he knew well enough, for he had left Red Dick lying senseless upon the rocky ledge, not having the heart to push him over into eternity in that condition; so the rascal really owed his life to Davy's clemency.

Close to where the two had fallen, there was a deep hole in the rocks, probably the cavern home of the wild beast that had been wont to make use of this second ledge, but Davy had no idea of entering there so long as he could help it.

Finding that the ledge still continued on, he crawled still further away from the spot where his late antagonist lay. He heard the giant throw himself upon the rocks, and knew he was peering down into the black depths and listening for some sound from those who had gone down so suddenly, so he remained very quiet until Dan had arisen and withdrawn, fully convinced that the trio had gone to a terrible death.

Davy was moving on once more, when he, too, caught sight of the mysterious light near the foot of the canyon. At first he was puzzled to know what it meant, but after a few minutes' reflection he had guessed.

Friends were welcome, and the affair would now grow more interesting. He must try and reach them in some way.

The rocky ledge now began to enter more deeply into the face of the cliff, and ascend at the same time. Soon it had assumed the shape of a regular defile, for walls arose on either side. The way was narrow, but Davy found little difficulty in traveling it, for there were secure places for his feet.

Higher he ascended.

What was probably the truth now came into his mind. He would come out upon the rocks that towered above the platform where the giant stood guard over his darling.

In spite of the tremendous exertions to which he had been put on this night, the young backwoodsman still possessed his usual amount of strength and boldness. Once let him gain the rocks above the platform, and he would surprise Hercules Dan, for during his previous visit to the place, Davy had noted its weak points with the eye of a general, though he had never expected to be obliged to take advantage of his knowledge.

Evidently the animal that had made its lodging in the cave, had two routes to and from the place, one of which led to the little canyon, and the other to the seemingly inaccessible rocks that towered above.

As the route presently grew rougher, Crockett found his task more laborious, but he stuck to it manfully, and finally had the satisfaction of finding himself upon the great rocks that reared their heads above the platform.

Here he stood for a few minutes, taking breath before commencing the hazardous course that he had already marked out for himself.

It was at this juncture that the voice of his bride rung out again upon the still air, and sent a thrill through every nerve of the young hunter. Then followed the short conversation between the giant and Rube Long.

Davy was delighted to know that it was his friend who had come upon the scene, and began to realize that if he could only get at the giant,

there would soon be an end put to the whole matter.

He waited some little time to ascertain what would be done by the others, but as all remained quiet, he at length determined to commence operations himself.

The plan that had come into Davy's head was bold, and could only have originated in the brain of one who laughed at danger, when the end justified the means.

He intended slipping over the edge of the rocks and making his way down to the old tree that grew out from the face of the cliff. From this point it would be easy to drop upon the ledge. As to what would follow, that was a matter yet to be solved.

The descent was commenced.

He had to proceed very cautiously, for a single slip of the foot might send him to eternity. Once he commenced falling down this abrupt inclined plane, he would gather a momentum with every passing yard, until he shot out into the air, beyond the platform and into the black gulf that stretched beyond.

Foot by foot he descended the face of the wall. There was no weapon upon his person, save the pistol he had snatched up before leaving the haunted mill, for his knife had been lost during the encounter with Red Dick.

Below him all was inky darkness.

He could not see the faintest outline of either the ledge or its occupants. Even the smoldering brands of the fire were for a time hidden from his view, as a portion of the rock jutting out, concealed them, but presently he sighted the remains of the camp-fire.

What was the giant doing?

Perhaps even at that instant his glaring eyes were turned upon the daring hunter. Some little movement of his might have drawn the attention of Hercules Dan, and the report of his rifle would be Davy's first knowledge of the fact.

In the face of such cheerless prospect, he continued his descent. Clambering down the unknown face of a cliff, where a slip would bring certain death to him, was not very entertaining sport, to be sure; but remembering for whose sake he incurred all these risks, Davy did not shrink.

Even should he slip, and manage to save himself from falling, the result would be equally disastrous, for the noise would have drawn the attention of the giant to the spot, and he would have Davy at his mercy.

What that mercy would be it was easy to understand; sooner would the tiger grant a reprieve to the deer that was in its power than this wolf of the border.

No one knew this better than his bitter foe, Davy. In descending to the lair of the outlaw he was taking his life in his hand.

Slowly lowering himself he continued his perilous descent. He was now only a couple of yards above the dead tree that hung over the ledge, as though seeking to form a canopy for it with its bare limbs.

At this point a small piece of stone broke under his weight.

This was enough to cause him to lose his balance. A form, crouching behind the rocks that guarded the canyon, sprang wildly erect, rifle in hand, as this clattering announced that some enemy was coming by means of a new route.

He looked up just in time to see through the dim light that foreshadowed the breaking of day, a human form dangling from the tree that hung over the ledge.

Davy had saved himself by sheer good luck, added to his own agility, but he was not yet entirely secure. His eyes were drawn to the figure by the rocks, and when he saw the rifle thrown up, he concluded it was time to drop.

Just as he let go his hold upon the tree, and shot downward toward the shelf, the sharp rifle crack rung out, but the bullet did no damage save to lop off an outlying twig.

Crockett alighted safely upon the rock, and found himself face to face with Red Dick! who seemed much amazed at meeting the man who he thought lay dead and mangled at the foot of the great precipice.

Davy lost no time in leaping upon the surprised man, giving a yell at the same time that he knew Rube Long would recognize. Sure enough, that worthy and one of his comrades came dashing on to the ledge—the other having been left to guard the exit—and Red Dick was speedily secured. Then it was discovered that both the giant and Rosebud Thornton had vanished from view in the most mysterious manner!

CHAPTER XV. GREEK AGAINST GREEK.

HERCULES DAN had given them the slip in some mysterious manner.

Davy and his comrades were amazed. They had taken it for granted that he was upon the ledge, and his strange disappearance startled them not a little.

In place of the giant, they were holding down the outlaw supposed to have gone to eternity with Davy Crockett, but as that individual was alive and well, it was nothing more than just to give Red Dick also the benefit of a doubt.

Davy saw through it quicker than the others. He had left this man upon the ledge below, and yet he had managed to regain the platform, which went to show that there was some means of communication between them.

While he was making his way down the face of the cliff in such a stealthy and laborious manner, the giant had probably been lowering Rosebud to the ledge, and following, himself, by means of the route up which his comrade Red Dick had come.

The hands of the latter were speedily bound behind him. Then one of the young hunters was left to watch the wretch, for his captors had already mentally decided that he should yet hang from the blasted tree that stood out from the face of the cliff.

Davy had guessed aright. The giant warmly greeted Red Dick who had arisen from the grave as it were, and quickly heard his story.

When this was told he was not long in deciding that it would be a good thing to place their captive in the cave Dick mentioned, to which the latter—ignorant of the fact that there was a means of leaving the ledge besides that which he had used—readily agreed, and offered to stand guard while his comrade was at work.

The giant's first duty was to secure the hands of the young girl. She looked alarmed at this, and would have resisted, but she was already half-dead with fear, and the horror of having seen Davy hurled over the precipice to a terrible death as it seemed, and besides, the giant assured her that no harm was intended, but that he wished to place her in safe quarters before the battle occurred between her friends and himself, aided by Red Dick.

So she suffered him to lower her to the ledge down the face of the cliff without a murmur, and there was no man who could have done this single-handed so well as the powerful ruffian.

Having accomplished this much Hercules Dan secured the rope above, and then began making his way down the rough and hazardous path which Red Dick had not found so difficult to climb up.

The rope was still there when Davy and his friends sought the spot with a like purpose in view, and confirmed their suspicions. It was thin but strong, and had been carried by the giant, wrapped around his waist, for just such an emergency.

When Hercules Dan reached the ledge he found the young girl standing there, trying to peer down into the depths, through which she believed her beloved Davy had gone.

The giant took hold of her arm and led her along. A few steps brought them to the frowning mouth of the hole in the wall.

It was at this time that a brilliant idea came into the head of the outlaw. In the faint light he could see that the rocky ledge did not stop here but continued on. Might it not be possible that there was another and easier method of reaching it, and also of leaving it, than by the dangerous route he had taken?

The thought was a bright one.

If he and his captive could give their foes the slip in such a neat manner, it would put another feather in his cap. To Dan the thought that he was deserting the comrade who had so valiantly stood by him, brought no reproach. He even chuckled while turning the matter over in his mind, and determined to try the neat joke.

Once more taking hold of Rosebud's arm he began to move cautiously along the very path that Crockett had used within the half-hour.

As the giant supposed, the ledge continued for a score of yards until it had gone far beyond the platform above, when it gradually changed into a miniature canyon, piercing the rocks and ascending.

He began to have strong hopes now of being able to leave his enemies in the lurch. They would rush in expecting to come upon him, and what would be their amazement at finding another bird in the nest, and the king-pin flown, together with the bride whom he had stolen!

Hercules Dan could not refrain from chuckling, when this scene was pictured upon his imagination. Was that an echo to his low laugh? He came to a sudden pause. The darkness surrounded him, but through it he could see a pair of glaring eyes that seemed to burn with all the intensity of coals of fire.

The truth rushed through his mind with the rapidity of a lightning flash. The animal was returning to its lair, and they had met face to face in the canyon, the wild panther of the forest, and the human wolf of the border! These were the brute's eyes, fastened so malignantly upon him, and the sound that he had at first taken for an echo of his exultant chuckle, was nothing more or less than a low growl of rage on the part of the animal.

Hercules Dan was no coward though he was figured as a villain of the first water in these pages, and left his comrades to the mercy of the enemy, several times. Such men are of queer composition. They have none of the ennobling traits of true courage, but when the pinch comes, they show quite a surprising amount of pure grit.

When he realized what lay before him, the action of the giant was extremely rapid.

With one hand he swept Rosebud behind him, and she remained crouching there by the stone wall, so completely unmoved that had she known escape lay open to her by a simple retreat back to the ledge, she would have been utterly incapable of making a movement in that direction.

The right hand of the giant had fallen upon the hilt of his long-bladed knife, which he at once drew from his belt. There was another low growl from the savage panther, and then he launched himself into the air.

It was at this instant that the rifle-shot of Red Dick cut the air, and the sounds of desperate struggle on the platform immediately followed. The sharp report may have served to divert the panther from its course, for he made a short leap, and landed directly in front of his human adversary.

Hercules Dan did not give the animal time to recover, but hastily threw himself forward.

The great weight of the Border Wolf was enough in itself to crush the panther, but the brute fought gallantly. But for the fact that Dan's left hand clutched its throat, the panther would have buried its fangs in his arm.

As it was, the sharp claws played havoc with Dan's hunting-shirt, and drew fantastic hieroglyphics upon his brawny breast, in lines of blood.

All this while the giant was plunging his long blade again and again into the side of the animal, and endeavoring to find its heart.

The panther died hard.

After fully a minute of this reciprocal amusement, the giant felt a sudden tremor go through the animal's frame. His last blow had struck a vital point.

The terrible claws ceased their furious work, another great shake on the part of the animal, and it gave up its ghost. From the close conflict the Border Wolf had come out the victor.

He arose, wiped his knife upon the body of his late foe, and then turning, once more caught Rosebud by the arm.

The sounds from the platform had now ceased, and Hercules Dan felt sure his mortal foes were upon his trail. Therefore he turned his face up the little canyon, and with Rosebud his prisoner, once more resumed his flight.

CHAPTER XVI.

BETWEEN THE WOLF AND HIS PREY.

The night was almost over, and the gray light of another day was approaching.

The skulking wolves sought their dark hiding-places, for no more could their howls be heard, sounding dismally through the silence.

The light grew gradually stronger, and vague outlines could be determined here and there. In the east, the low-lying light looked like a bank of white fog, but before many minutes had passed this would give way to the glory of the coming sun.

A solitary form was moving through the forest at this hour, and as a small glade was reached where the dawning light was not intercepted by trees, the fact was made manifest that this lonely person was no other than the strange girl whom we have seen in such remarkably opposite positions, Barbara Warner.

She had not gone home, as Davy had bade her, but had followed after him. In the intense darkness, and having but a general knowledge of the country's topography, it was scarcely to be wondered at that she had become lost, and

wandered hither and thither, in and out of the valleys, and almost where her horse willed.

The sound of a distant shot came to her ears, and then she knew which way to go. There was a light in the east that told of the coming day, but surely no one would be firing a weapon at such an hour unless, indeed, it was at some object that threatened danger.

Barbara urged her horse toward the great hills that stood up between her and the sky and from which the shot had come. In the darkness her horse stumbled and fell, and she only slipped from his back in time to escape being crushed as he rolled over.

All her efforts to get him up were fruitless, and she realized that he must have broken a leg in his sudden fall.

Still she would not be balked of being at the scene of the firing. At whom had that shot been sent? Perhaps Davy lay weltering in his blood at that instant. What ruin her pitiless hatred and jealousy had wrought!

The thought was maddening in her now penitent mood. She fairly flew through the great forest toward her destination. If Heaven would only give her the chance to undo all the wrong her scheming had brought with it, she would not deem it too much to pay for it with her life.

Barbara was now breathing heavily but she had the satisfaction of knowing that she had greatly decreased the space between herself and the hill from whence had come the shot that had sent a shiver of dread through her whole frame.

A crashing in the bushes now caught her attention, and brought her to a sudden halt.

Some one was coming toward her. Who it could be she knew not, but many suspicions darted into her head, and she stood with the light of eager expectancy lighting up her face.

Nearer came the sounds. Plainly some one was making haste through the forest. Barbara crouched behind a monstrous beech-tree, and waited for the turn of events.

The unknown was coming directly for the place where she crouched, and in a very few minutes she would be enabled to make him out while he was yet unaware of her presence.

Straight to the tree came the unknown. He crashed down the bushes as if they were no impediment at all; but he was not alone. He led a figure in white.

It was the Border Wolf and his prey.

At the foot of the beech-tree he halted, while Barbara slipped around it stealthily.

"Set you down and rest; I reckon ye need it after the spell ye've gone through. We'll give the hounds the slip yet; they'll find that Hercules Dan are more than their equal. Any way, Crockett 'll never trouble me again. That fall must have broken every bone in his body, and I reckon they'll have to gather him up in a basket, for a man never yet fell from Devil's Perch, down to them rocks below and lived. So ye'd better be forgettin' all about yer dead Davy, and thinkin' what a nice husband I'll make ye when we give these critters the slip and git to some place whar thar's a person to jine us. Don't look so gloomy, gal; ye ought to be more peart, considering."

The unseen listener shuddered at his words. Davy dead! the man whom she had loved so madly, gone over the rocks at Devil's Perch to such a horrible fate?

She buried her face in her hands to shut out the terrible spectacle that arose before her mental vision. If Crockett was dead, then it was better that she had also gone the long journey, for life was worthless to her, now that he had died through her machinations.

As she removed her hands, her eyes fell upon the white-robed figure that sat upon the hummock at the foot of the tree, plainly in an attitude of the greatest grief and despair.

Here was another mourning for Davy. Here was one whom he had loved better than life, and she was dear to her now because of the sacred tie that bound them love, for Crockett.

This man's hands were red with Davy's blood! The very thought sent the blood pulsating through her veins with increased swiftness. Could she not save Rosebud from the terrible fate that hung over her, and avenge Davy at the same time?

It was well worth trying, and her life was so useless, any way, that the risk did not amount to much. Barbara clinched her teeth, and put her hand to where her pistol was concealed.

In the meanwhile the giant had stood looking down upon his helpless captive with the glowering eyes one would expect to see in a tiger, glaring upon his prey.

All at once he gave a visible start and turned around. Some sound had been borne to his ears by the cool morning breeze.

"Hail they hunt the Border Wolf; they would track him to the death! Let them come, I care not! I have a power in the gal here, that I won't hesitate to use ag'in' them, if they force me to it. Thar's no gainsaying the matter. Hercules Dan is going out of this country mighty soon, and he's going to take Crockett's bride along with him.

"Thar they come; I can see the light a-flaming through the trees, yonder. If I only had a hoss now, 'twould sarve me well. Come, my gal, we must be movin'. We'll pretend, ye know, we're an elopin' couple, an' them critters yonder, are yer dad an' his friends. Come, my beauty, thar ain't no time—Thunder! the she-devil!"

His last exclamation was perfectly natural. As he spoke, he turned to assist Rosebud to her feet, and hurry the poor girl through the forest. Between his prey and himself there stood the same black-robed figure that had defied him in the old mill, and whose bullet had sent one of his friends to his last account.

Barbara Warner was there to protect the one whom Davy had loved, and she looked like a tigress defending her young, as the morning light streamed upon her.

CHAPTER XVII.

A LIFE FOR LOVE.

HERCULES DAN stood as if rooted to the spot for fully half a minute.

When he turned to seize upon his prey and plunge once more into the depths of the great forest, where his trackers could be easily shaken off or ambuscaded—when he turned and found himself face to face with the very woman who had incited him to all this deviltry, and then so boldly defied her confederates at the haunted mill, in defense of the girl whom she had before wished to destroy, the giant seemed turned into stone.

His eyes were fastened upon Barbara Warner, at first showing surprise and not a little fear, but which quickly changed to furious anger.

Her black eyes flashed into his with all the determination that was in her soul, and it was evident that Barbara would not hesitate to kill him on the spot if he dared to move toward the golden-haired bride of Davy Crockett who crouched behind her protectress in mortal fear, and yet repeating the name of Barbara Warner, coupled with the blessing of Heaven upon it.

Meanwhile his pursuers were all the time drawing closer, and in a few minutes would be upon the spot.

True, he could easily dash off into the neighboring forest, and lose his trail amid the labyrinth of trees; Barbara would not attempt to prevent that, but he could not go without Rosebud.

His glaring eyes were cast upon the brave girl who stood between him and his prey, and she seemed to understand intuitively that there was something terrible about to happen for her hand appeared from the folds of her dress, and in it was clasped the mate of the deadly derringer that had sounded the doom of the ruffian in the haunted mill.

He had not been entirely motionless. His hand had involuntarily rested upon one of his pistols, at first sight of Barbara, and this he had gradually taken from his belt, drawing the hammer back at the same time. His movement was not noticed by Barbara. While she thought he stood rooted to the spot, he was preparing for her death, for suddenly his arm was outstretched, with a gleaming pistol held in it. The miscreant would not hesitate to murder a woman in order to gain his end.

A sudden explosion, quickly followed by a cry of alarm and pain from Barbara! The bullet had struck her in the left arm, owing to her sudden movement.

This was all he wanted however, for she was only a woman after all, and the shock of the wound unnerved her. The arm holding the derringer fell to her side, and she would have sunk to the ground only for the support of the tree against which she leaned.

Hercules Dan uttered a suppressed shout of satisfaction, and started toward the cowering form with golden hair that crouched to one side of Barbara. His enemies were now fearfully close, but if he could once get Rosebud in his arms he would be able to defy them even if it came to the worst, and they overtook him before he reached a place where he knew he could get a horse.

He only took two steps forward when Bar-

bara Warner seemed to recover herself. The old-time fire blazed from her eyes. Once more the derringer covered the bulky form of the giant. He did not see it, for his eyes were riveted upon the form upon the ground, and he was calculating how many rods he would be away, before the five trackers could reach the spot.

The derringer was discharged with a dull, deadly report. Hercules Dan came to a sudden pause, and no wonder. Barbara Warner had often practiced shooting with Davy Crockett, and in this critical moment she did not forget the lessons she had received from him.

Then the giant seemed to sway like a drunken man, or a vessel at sea. A mist came before his eyes. He threw out his hands but they failed to find any support, and at last he fell upon his side with a heavy lunge.

Barbara gave a cry of satisfaction when she saw that her bullet had accomplished its work. Then she leaned against the tree again; she felt very weak.

She closed her eyes and shut her teeth hard, determined not to faint, but she was very near it, for, after all, Barbara Warner was but a woman.

Nearer came the rushing footsteps. In another minute they would have reached the spot. The fallen giant, though struck mortally, yet was not beyond doing a last dastardly act, for raising upon one elbow he managed to gain an upright position, propping himself up with his left hand.

The wounded girl was aroused by a cry of demoniac joy, and lifting her head saw that Hercules Dan had raised himself even when on the brink of eternity, and was aiming a pistol at the white form of Rosebud, crouching beside the tree!

His baleful eyes glared with all the power of an evil soul approaching its end, and gloating in the fact that he could finish his life as he had lived it, with murder.

There was a cry from Barbara, a flash and a report, and the bullet sent with such deadly intent, sped on its mission, but a black-robed figure bounded between Rosebud and the murderer, and brave Barbara with her life atoned for all she had done.

Hercules Dan sunk back weak and dying. The hasty footsteps now seemed to fly along, and a human form bounded into the little glade. He cast a hasty glance around, saw the three recumbent forms, and then a great cry welled from his throat.

That cry reached the ears of the living and the dying. The white-robed figure that had been bending over poor Barbara sprang suddenly erect, and with a wild cry of "Davy" leaped into the arms of the young hunter.

The dying murderer heard that name, and raised his head far enough to see that those whom he thought were dead, were clasped in each other's arms. Then with a curse he fell back, and his black soul took its flight.

Barbara also heard the name, and a look of joy came into her pale features. She stretched out her hand to them and they were instantly bending over the poor girl. She spoke, but her words were hardly louder than a whisper.

"Forgive me, Davy. Sometimes remember poor Barbara. She gave all she had, her life, to save your bride. I am going. Oh sweet Heaven, have mercy! Good-by, Davy, darling. Kiss me, she will not care now. It is all I ask."

The tears came from his eyes as he bent down and did as she requested. They each of them holding her hand watched in pitying silence as the spirit of Barbara Warner winged its flight, and at last she lay before them, dead.

She had sinned, but her atonement had been her own life; what more could she do?

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONCLUSION.

BARBARA WAS DEAD.

What emotions filled the hearts of the two who bent over her, it would be hard to say, but Davy realized what a noble woman she had been when she let the promptings of her heart be heard, while Rosebud mourned in secret for many months because she had been the innocent means of destroying that young life.

The girl who had given her life for another, and that other the rival who, in her mind, had stolen the heart she worshiped so madly, was worthy of all true remembrance, and when at Barbara's funeral the old white-haired parson spoke of this great sacrifice on her part, there was not a dry eye among the crowd assembled at the judge's house over the hills.

The judge never recovered from this terrible

blow. He was a slight, white-haired man, and as the months went on, changing into years, he became bent with sorrow and age. Still, he was always cheerful, and having taken a decided liking to Crockett, partly, no doubt, because his child had loved him so madly, he pushed Davy along in politics until the young backwoodsman entered the arena as candidate for Congress.

The judge lived long enough to see his *protege* in the halls of legislation, and was then laid to rest with his erring but repentant child.

Hercules Dan was buried in the forest near by where he had fallen, but there were no wet eyes at his funeral, not a soul to mourn his sudden taking off. The border was well freed of its desperate characters, and the settlers could rest in peace for some time to come.

While on the way home, Rube Long left his friends for an hour or so, and hastened to the ledge where some of the exciting incidents of our story were enacted.

Here, it will be remembered, Red Dick, the outlaw lay, watched by one of the young hunters who had accompanied Rube on the trail. This scoundrel had escaped death in a manner almost miraculous when he and Davy fell over the ledge, but this time he was fated to go the long road that knows no turning.

A rope was brought into requisition, and the old dead tree made use of. When Rube and his comrade left Devil's Perch, it was deserted save by a swinging form that swayed to and fro, turning around slowly as the rope twisted and untwisted, and at which the buzzards, floating past the mountains, looked with greedy eyes.

Such was the fate of Red Dick.

His savage dog had found a grave, as the reader already knows, at the foot of the great precipice, from which fate Davy and his adversary had been saved, by the second ledge that ran down to the panther's den, and beyond, passing through the little canyon to the forest.

Once more a jolly company was assembled in the capacious cabin of Mr. Thornton, and this time the right dominion was in attendance. He was the same white-haired man who had officiated at Barbara's funeral, and who had been absent on the previous occasion of festivity, attending some convention of circuit-riders.

Davy and his bride could but remember the white face that lay under the wild-flowers, and in their hearts they would ever cherish the memory of the judge's daughter who had given her life for them.

Notwithstanding this, it was a merry time, for the young backwoodsman had hosts of friends, who would have done much for him at any time.

After the parson had finished his task, the fun began.

There was very little space left for dancing, so an adjournment of the young people was made to the barn, whither the music had preceded them.

A rude platform had been erected at one end. Upon this Pompey White, a negro whose skin rivaled the blackness of night in its sable hue, and Donald Black, a Scotchman with a face as fair as the mist that arose in the morning from the Cumberland, took their place.

The strange team, each of whom possessed a name that belied his features, was the acknowledged champion musical combination of the backwoods, and more young hearts had beat as one under the magic of their sawing, than could be well calculated.

No sooner were the first twangs heard as Donald and his sable *confreere* tuned up their fiddles, than excitement reigned supreme among the young folks, and all eyes were turned upon Davy, who, according to the etiquette of that day, was destined to open the ball by dancing with his bride.

No one at the happy gathering had a better time than Rube Long unless it was the two young hunters who had accompanied him on the trail of the Border Wolf, for they were all looked upon as heroes, and there was not a girl present who was not proud to be asked to dance with them.

So Davy was started upon a new life, and his many friends hoped it would be one strewed with roses.

Long was the name of Davy Crockett known in Tennessee. When he was sent to Congress he won respect by his integrity and manly qualities, and the greatest statesmen were fond of associating with him, to catch some of the wholesome truths that fell from the lips of the backwoods Congressman.

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